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The following departments and organisations have reviewed the report:

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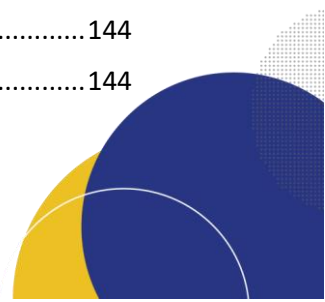
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It must be noted that the review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EASO.

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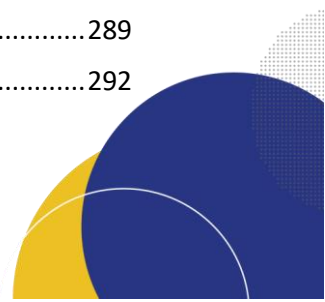
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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019).¹ The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

‘Refugee’, ‘risk’ and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither EASO nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 31 May 2021. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the [methodology](#) section of the ACLED is a project collecting, analysing and mapping information on ‘the dates, actors, locations, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protest events across Africa, the Middle East, Latin America & the Caribbean, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia & the Caucasus, Europe, and the United States of America’. Its methodology applied for coding and monitoring of the data is explained in details in its Codebook and in a specific methodology for Afghanistan. As ACLED points out, the reader should, however, be aware of some limitations in the data. These limitations are:

‘the first is that most of the data is gathered based on publicly available, secondary reports. This means that the data is in part a reflection of the coverage and reporting priorities of media and international organisations. One of the effects of this is that it may underestimate the volume of events of non-strategic importance (for example, low-level communal conflict, or events in very isolated areas). We work to address this possibility by triangulating data sources to include humanitarian and international organisation reports, rather than media alone; and by conducting ground-truthing exercises in which we present data to local organisations and partners to assess its validity among people working directly in conflict-affected contexts.’

Therefore, ACLED's figures in this report are to be considered as an estimate and indication of trends in violence over a given period of time.

For Afghanistan, ACLED covers political violence and protest spanning from January 2017 to the present. Each week, ACLED researches and reviews about 60 sources in English and Dari/Farsi on political violence in Afghanistan and collects the information into a database.

ACLED codes security incidents as follows:

- ‘Battles’: ‘a violent interaction between two politically organized armed groups at a particular time and location.’ ‘Battles can occur between armed and organised state, non-state, and external groups, and in any combination therein.’ Sub-events of battles are

¹ The 2019 EASO COI Report Methodology can be downloaded from the EASO COI Portal, [url](#)

‘armed clash’, ‘government regains territory’ and ‘non-state actor overtakes territory’. The sub-event type ‘Armed clash’ occurs when ‘armed, organized groups engage in a battle, and no reports indicate a change in territorial control’.

- ‘Violence against civilians’: ‘violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants’. ‘Violence against civilians includes attempts at inflicting harm (e.g., beating, shooting, torture, rape, mutilation, etc.) or forcibly disappearing (e.g., kidnapping and disappearances) civilian actors.’ The following sub-event types are associated with the violence against civilians event type: ‘Sexual violence’, ‘Attack’, and ‘Abduction/forced disappearance’.
- ‘Explosions/remote violence’: ‘one-sided violent events in which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the target to respond.’ They include: ‘Chemical weapon’, ‘Air/drone strike’, ‘Suicide bomb’, ‘Shelling/artillery/missile attack’, ‘Remote explosive/landmine/IED’, and ‘Grenade’.
- ‘Riots’: are a violent demonstration, often involving a spontaneous action by unorganised, unaffiliated members of society. They include ‘violent demonstrations’, ‘mob violence’.
- ‘Protests’: ‘public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them.’ It includes ‘peaceful protests’, ‘protests with intervention’, ‘excessive force against protesters’.
- ‘Strategic developments’: ‘contextually important information regarding the activities of violent groups that is not itself recorded as political violence, yet may trigger future events or contribute to political dynamics within and across states.’ It includes ‘agreements’, ‘changes to group/activity’, ‘non-violent transfers of territory’, ‘arrests’.

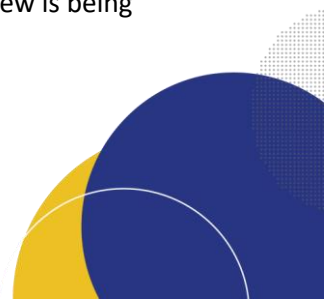
EASO provided analytical graphs on security incidents based on publicly available ACLED data. For the purpose of this report, only the following types of events were included as violent incidents in the analysis of the security situation in Afghanistan: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. The reference period for the ACLED data is from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021 and EASO downloaded the ACLED curated data files on Central Asia and the Caucasus, including Afghanistan, on 25 March 2021 (url). ACLED identified in its 2019 Codebook three codes for the geo-precision of events:

‘If the report notes a particular town, and coordinates are available for that town, the highest precision level “1” is recorded. If the source material notes that activity took place in a small part of a region, and notes a general area, a town with georeferenced coordinates to represent that area is chosen and the geo-precision code will note “2” for “part of region”. If activity occurs near a town or a city, this same precision code is employed. If a larger region is mentioned, the closest natural location noted in reporting (like “border area”, “forest” or “sea”, among others) is chosen to represent the region – or a provincial capital is used if no other information at all is available – and is noted with precision level “3”. No ACLED event is associated with the “country” as the smallest location unit available.’

In the provincial chapters of this report, the EASO analytical graphs holding the breakdown of incidents per administrative unit level 2 (districts) do not include the incidents with code 3, as ACLED has no information about the location of these incidents within the province.

It has to be noted that ACLED made the following statement on its website regarding Afghanistan data:

‘ACLED is currently reviewing trends in coverage between 2019 and 2020 in Afghanistan. We believe a shift in reporting by the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Taliban’s Voice of Jihad (VOJ) may have contributed to a trend depicting a reduction in violence. The team is currently supplementing coverage by drawing on additional sources. While this review is being undertaken, we would advise against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020.’



On **territorial control by the Taliban** in Afghanistan, information collected and presented in a map by the Long War Journal (LWJ) was used in this report, alongside additional sources researched to the extent possible to corroborate the LWJ findings. One of these additional sources is Bilal Sarwary, an independent Afghan journalist based in Kabul, who was BBC correspondent on Afghanistan for more than thirteen years. Bilal Sarwary gives regular updates on the shifting frontlines on his Twitter account with information gathered from his sources in the field.

The LWJ is a project by the non-profit policy institute the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD). The LWJ's Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan is based on open-source information, such as press reports and information provided by government agencies and the Taliban. The LWJ classifies the level of control as follows:

“‘Unconfirmed’ district [...] has some level of claim-of-control made by the Taliban, but either has not yet been—or cannot be— independently verified by LWJ research. A “Contested” district may mean that the government may be in control of the district center, but little else, and the Taliban controls large areas or all of the areas outside of the district center. A “Controlled” district may mean the Taliban is openly administering a district, providing services and security, and also running the local courts.’

On **internal displacement**, the main source used is the ‘Internal Displacement due to Conflict’ data collection by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). The UNOCHA data reported in the displacement sections was extracted on the ‘accessed date’ indicated in the Bibliography.

Structure and use of the report

This report is not meant to be read as a whole. In the first part a general description is given on the security situation in Afghanistan including a geographical overview, which is then explained in greater detail in the second part, holding a regional description of geographic subdivisions (Kabul City and 34 provinces).

Provinces and districts

The provincial chapters in this report are organised alphabetically and have the following structure: a general description of the province contains information on the geography and population; the conflict background takes a longer term look at the security situation in a province, including the armed actors active in the province. A section on recent trends in the security situation describes the nature of the violence, targets, locations, and casualties within the timeframe from 1 January 2020 – 31 May 2021. Recent security incidents described in sub-sections should be read as illustrations of trends in the security situation and not as an exhaustive list of incidents. Finally, conflict-induced displacements are described in a separate section.

Both the general and regional sections provide information from various sources on the relevant elements and indicators. Information on an indicator as such should never be taken as conclusive but as indicative for protection assessment and is to be read together with all other indicators and information on the region (or province, district).

There are a number of provinces and districts for which the administrative boundaries are unclear. For example, it is unclear whether the district of Gizab belongs to Uruzgan or Daykundi province. Nor is it clear whether the district of Gormach belongs to Badghis or Faryab province.

The Managing Director at Alcis, a company providing geographic information services with many years of experience in Afghanistan, contacted by OFPRA's Information, Documentation and Research Division, stated in an e-mail in August 2017 that

‘there is not one unified agreed district and province boundary dataset currently in use. There are various ‘official’ versions. [...] The boundaries within these different datasets have changed over time. Some districts have been passed across to other provinces for administrative purposes. Some new districts have been created over time. Some areas within Afghanistan are still referred to as districts by locals of the area, even though they have never had boundaries created for them and never been treated as a district.’

In absence of an official list of districts, EASO chooses in principle to follow the administrative divisions of the provinces used by UNOCHA, as they produce very clear maps and use the same division systematically in all their publications.

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Glossary and Abbreviations

AAN	Afghanistan Analysts Network ²
AGEs	Anti-Government Elements ³
ALCS	Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey
ANASOC	Afghan National Army Special Operations Command ⁴
ANDSF/ANSF	Afghan National Defense And Security Forces ⁵ /Afghan National Security Forces, an umbrella term which includes: ⁶ ABF (Afghan Border Force) ALP (Afghan Local Police) ANA (Afghan National Army) AAF (Afghan Air Force) ANP (Afghan National Police) ANCOF (Afghan National Civil Order Force) ASF (Afghan Special Forces) ANA TF (Afghan National Army Territorial Force) NDS (National Directorate of Security)
<i>Arbaki</i>	Locally recruited or tribal militia
AQ	Al Qaeda ⁷
Attrition	Attrition is unplanned and planned total losses, including Dropped from Rolls, Killed in Action, Separation, and Other losses [disappearance/captured, disability, death (not in action), retirement, exempted (i.e. AWOL or permanent medical), or transfer to the ANA/ANP] ⁸
AWOL	Absent Without Official Leave ⁹
<i>Bacha bazi</i>	Exploitation of boys by wealthy or powerful men for entertainment, notably for dancing and sexual activities ¹⁰
Civilian	UNAMA refers to international law for a definition of 'civilians': persons who are not members of military/paramilitary forces or members of organised armed groups with continuous combat

² AAN, About AAN, n.d., [url](#)

³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 102

⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 67

⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 67

⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 104

⁷ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 67

⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 24

⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 67

¹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), 105

	function and are protected against direct attacks unless and for such time as they directly participate in hostilities. ¹¹
<i>Eid</i>	A Muslim festival, notably <i>Eid al-Fitr</i> or <i>Eid al-Adha</i> ¹²
ETIM	Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement ¹³
GIROA, GoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan ¹⁴
Ground engagements	Ground engagements include kinetic ground operations, stand-off attacks, crossfire, and armed clashes between parties to the conflict. Ground engagements include attacks or operations in which small arms, heavy weapons and/or area weapons systems, i.e. mortars and rockets are fired. ¹⁵
<i>Hawala</i>	Money transfer system
HIG	Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar ¹⁶
IEC	Independent Election Commission ¹⁷
IED	Improvised Explosive Device. A bomb constructed and deployed in ways other than in conventional military action. IEDs can broadly be divided into four categories: Command-Operated IEDs – Radio or remote-controlled IEDs operated from a distance that can enable operators to detonate a pre-placed device at the precise time a target moves into the target area. Magnetic-IEDs are IEDs attached to a magnetic or other device and are a sub-category of command-operated IEDs. Victim-Operated IEDs – These detonate when a person or vehicle triggers the initiator or switch which could be a pressure plate (PP-IED), a pressure release mechanism, a trip wire or another device, resulting in an explosion. Other IEDs – This category includes command-wired IEDs, timed-IEDs and IEDs where the trigger/switch type for detonation could not be determined. Suicide IEDs – Separately from data on IEDs, UNAMA documents civilian casualties resulting from complex and suicide attacks. Suicide IEDs are generally either Body-Borne IEDs (BB-IEDs) or Suicide Vehicle-Borne IEDs (SVB-IEDs). Body-Borne IEDs refer to situations where a suicide bomber wears an explosive vest or belt, while Suicide Vehicle-Borne IEDs is defined as the detonation of a vehicle rigged with explosives by a driver or passenger inside the vehicle, or the

¹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 105

¹² Lexico, Eid, n.d., [url](#)

¹³ UN Security Council, Twenty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/53, [url](#), para. 57

¹⁴ Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of, The Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's Statement over the Peace Negotiations, 8 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 106

¹⁶ International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland, 27 June 2011, [url](#), p. 32

¹⁷ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Bamyān, 2020, [url](#)

	detonation of a BB-IED by the driver or a passenger while inside the vehicle. ¹⁸
IMF	International Military Forces ¹⁹
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan ²⁰
ISKP, ISIL-KP, IS	Islamic State, also called ISIS, ISIL or Daesh. Islamic State in Afghanistan is referred to as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) ²¹
Khost Protection Force	A 'campaign force' that was established after 2001 under international (CIA/US special forces) control. There are long-standing allegations against the Khost Protection Force of extrajudicial killings, torture, beating and unlawful detentions. ²²
LeJ	Lashkar-e Jhangvi ²³
LeT	Lashkar-e Tayyiba ²⁴
<i>Loya Jirga</i>	"'grand council'" in Pashto, is a mass national gathering that brings together representatives from the various ethnic, religious, and tribal communities in Afghanistan ²⁵
OFS	Operation Freedom's Sentinel ²⁶
PGF	Pro-Government Forces. Afghan National Security Forces and other forces and groups that act in military or paramilitary counter-insurgency operations and are directly or indirectly under the control of the government of Afghanistan ²⁷
Red Unit/Red Brigade	In 2015, the Taliban established a 'special forces' unit named Red Unit or Red Brigade ('sra qet'a' in Pashto). They are better equipped and trained and are generally used as a 'rapid reaction force'. ²⁸
RS	Resolute Support; a NATO-led mission ²⁹
SIGAR	U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction ³⁰
<i>Tazkera</i>	Afghan ID document
<i>Tolay</i>	company

¹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 106

¹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 106

²⁰ UN Security Council, Twenty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/53, [url](#), para. 57

²¹ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides (1): Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²² Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

²³ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, [url](#), p. 20

²⁴ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, [url](#), p. 20

²⁵ RFE/RL, Loya Jirga -- An Afghan Tradition Explained, 20 November 2013, [url](#)

²⁶ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2020–September 30, 17 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 101

²⁸ Times (The), Helmand teeters after Taliban storm in with British tactics, 21 August 2016, [url](#)

²⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 55

³⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 55

UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan
USDOD	United States Department of Defense
USDOS	United States Department of State
<i>Ushr</i>	An Islamic tax (normally 10 %) on certain products, for example agricultural products. ³¹

³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill HIA commander's sons in Ghor clash, 13 January 2018, [url](#)

Introduction

This report was co-drafted by the EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) sector and specialists from the COI units and asylum offices listed in the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

This report aims to provide information on the security situation in Afghanistan, which is relevant for the assessment of international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection, and in particular for use in EASO's country guidance development on Afghanistan. The terms of reference can be found in [Annex 2](#).

Methodology

This report is an update of the EASO COI report Afghanistan Security Situation first published in January 2015 and updated annually.³² This report is produced in line with the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019)³³ and the EASO COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019).³⁴

For the assessment of the need for international protection, the terms of reference for this report have been developed with a focus on the key elements from Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive (QD).

Based on various sources consulted by EASO³⁵, these key elements can be broken down into topics and/or indicators. Examples include: parties to the conflict; intensity level of the violence; nature of the violence; regional spreading of the violence; targets of the violence; risk of collateral damage; use of arms and tactics; possibility to reach areas – security of transport (roads and airports); and indirect effects of the violence/conflict.

Based upon a study of all the mentioned sources, a list of elements and indicators was drafted, which served as a basis for the terms of reference (see [Annex 2](#)). To make a well-informed assessment of the fear of persecution or risk of serious harm, information is needed on these security-related elements and indicators on a regional, provincial or even district level in the country of origin.

EU+ countries'³⁶ COI specialists, policy and decision experts and UNHCR gave input on the terms of reference.

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources. The reference period for the description of latest trends and illustrative incidents is from 1 January 2020 until 5 March 2021. Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 31 May 2021.

To ensure that the drafters respected the EASO COI Report Methodology, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#)

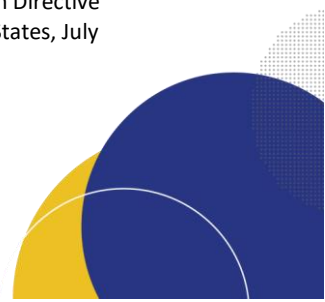
³² EASO COI reports are available via EASO's website: [url](#)

³³ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

³⁴ EASO, Writing and Referencing Guide for EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, [url](#)

³⁵ The elements, topics and indicators were identified by various sources that have a different position in the legal hierarchy and provide different levels of detail: The Qualification Directive (Recitals and articles); Case law from the Court of Justice of the EU in Luxembourg; National State Practice (National legislation; National case law; National policy and first instance decision practice); Case law from the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg; Opinions of experts, academics and specialised organisations; See the following EASO publications: EASO, Article 15(c) Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU) A judicial analysis, December 2014, [url](#); The Implementation of Article 15(c) QD in EU Member States, July 2015, [url](#)

³⁶ EU+ countries are the EU Member States plus the associated countries Norway and Switzerland.



section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report.

Sources

For data on **civilian casualties**, the main source used in this report is the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). UNAMA uses for their reports on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan a robust methodology to verify reported incidents by corroborating and cross-checking incidents, conducting on-site investigations, and consulting a broad range of credible and reliable sources. For verification of each incident involving a civilian casualty, UNAMA requires at least three different and independent sources. Unverified incidents are not included in its reporting.³⁷ According to analysts, this stringent verification standard also means ‘there may be many more casualties than UNAMA is able to confirm.’³⁸

In addition, to illustrate examples of incidents which caused civilian casualties in some provinces, information from The New York Times’ Afghan War Casualty Report was used, among other media sources. The Afghan War Casualty Report is a weekly and monthly bulletin compiling ‘all significant security incidents confirmed by New York Times reporters throughout Afghanistan’. As New York Times clarifies ‘the report includes government claims of insurgent casualty figures, but in most cases these cannot be independently verified by The Times. Similarly, the reports do not include Taliban claims for their attacks on the government unless they can be verified.’³⁹ Information from Voice of Jihad,⁴⁰ the Taliban’s official website, was also used in the report mainly to illustrate examples of incidents causing civilian casualties in some provinces.

For data on **violent incidents**, publicly available curated datasets from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) have been used.

ACLED is a project collecting, analysing and mapping information on ‘the dates, actors, locations, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protest events across Africa, the Middle East, Latin America & the Caribbean, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia & the Caucasus, Europe, and the United States of America’.⁴¹ Its methodology applied for coding and monitoring of the data is explained in details in its Codebook and in a specific methodology for Afghanistan.⁴² As ACLED points out, the reader should, however, be aware of some limitations in the data. These limitations are:

‘the first is that most of the data is gathered based on publicly available, secondary reports. This means that the data is in part a reflection of the coverage and reporting priorities of media and international organisations. One of the effects of this is that it may underestimate the volume of events of non-strategic importance (for example, low-level communal conflict, or events in very isolated areas). We work to address this possibility by triangulating data sources to include humanitarian and international organisation reports, rather than media alone; and by conducting ground-truthing exercises in which we present

³⁷ UNAMA’s full description of their methodology can be found at: UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. i-ii

³⁸ Bjelica, J. and Ruttig, T., UNAMA Mid-Year Report 2017: Number of civilian casualties still at “record level”, 18 July 2017, [url](#)

³⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁰ Voice of Jihad, [English], n.d., [url](#)

⁴¹ ACLED, About Acled, n.d., [url](#)

⁴² ACLED Codebook, n.d., [url](#); ACLED methodology and coding decisions around the conflict in Afghanistan, version 3, March 2020, [url](#)

data to local organisations and partners to assess its validity among people working directly in conflict-affected contexts.’⁴³

Therefore, ACLED's figures in this report are to be considered as an estimate and indication of trends in violence over a given period of time.

For Afghanistan, ACLED covers political violence and protest spanning from January 2017 to the present. Each week, ACLED researches and reviews about 60 sources in English and Dari/Farsi on political violence in Afghanistan and collects the information into a database.⁴⁴

ACLED codes security incidents as follows:

- ‘Battles’: ‘a violent interaction between two politically organized armed groups at a particular time and location.’ ‘Battles can occur between armed and organised state, non-state, and external groups, and in any combination therein.’ Sub-events of battles are ‘armed clash’, ‘government regains territory’ and ‘non-state actor overtakes territory’. The sub-event type ‘Armed clash’ occurs when ‘armed, organized groups engage in a battle, and no reports indicate a change in territorial control’.
- ‘Violence against civilians’: ‘violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants’. ‘Violence against civilians includes attempts at inflicting harm (e.g., beating, shooting, torture, rape, mutilation, etc.) or forcibly disappearing (e.g., kidnapping and disappearances) civilian actors.’ The following sub-event types are associated with the violence against civilians event type: ‘Sexual violence’, ‘Attack’, and ‘Abduction/forced disappearance’.
- ‘Explosions/remote violence’: ‘one-sided violent events in which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the target to respond.’ They include: ‘Chemical weapon’, ‘Air/drone strike’, ‘Suicide bomb’, ‘Shelling/artillery/missile attack’, ‘Remote explosive/landmine/IED’, and ‘Grenade’.
- ‘Riots’: ‘are a violent demonstration, often involving a spontaneous action by unorganised, unaffiliated members of society. They include ‘violent demonstrations’, ‘mob violence’.
- ‘Protests’: ‘public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them.’ It includes ‘peaceful protests’, ‘protests with intervention’, ‘excessive force against protesters’.
- ‘Strategic developments’: ‘contextually important information regarding the activities of violent groups that is not itself recorded as political violence, yet may trigger future events or contribute to political dynamics within and across states.’ It includes ‘agreements’, ‘changes to group/activity’, ‘non-violent transfers of territory’, ‘arrests’.⁴⁵

EASO provided analytical graphs on security incidents based on publicly available ACLED data. For the purpose of this report, only the following types of events were included as violent incidents in the analysis of the security situation in Afghanistan: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. The reference period for the ACLED data is from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021 and EASO downloaded the ACLED curated data files on Central Asia and the Caucasus, including Afghanistan, on 25 March 2021 ([url](#)). ACLED identified in its 2019 Codebook⁴⁶ three codes for the geo-precision of events:

‘If the report notes a particular town, and coordinates are available for that town, the highest precision level “1” is recorded. If the source material notes that activity took place in a small part of a region, and notes a general area, a town with georeferenced coordinates to represent that area is chosen and the geo-precision code will note “2” for “part of region”. If

⁴³ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Guide for Media Users, January 2015, [url](#), pp. 9-10

⁴⁴ ACLED, Methodology and Coding Decisions around the Conflict in Afghanistan, (Version 3) March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 7-14

⁴⁶ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, 2019, [url](#), p. 29

activity occurs near a town or a city, this same precision code is employed. If a larger region is mentioned, the closest natural location noted in reporting (like “border area”, “forest” or “sea”, among others) is chosen to represent the region – or a provincial capital is used if no other information at all is available – and is noted with precision level “3”. No ACLED event is associated with the “country” as the smallest location unit available.’

In the provincial chapters of this report, the EASO analytical graphs holding the breakdown of incidents per administrative unit level 2 (districts) do not include the incidents with code 3, as ACLED has no information about the location of these incidents within the province.

It has to be noted that ACLED made the following statement on its website regarding Afghanistan data:

‘ACLED is currently reviewing trends in coverage between 2019 and 2020 in Afghanistan. We believe a shift in reporting by the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Taliban’s Voice of Jihad (VOJ) may have contributed to a trend depicting a reduction in violence. The team is currently supplementing coverage by drawing on additional sources. While this review is being undertaken, we would advise against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020.’⁴⁷

On **territorial control by the Taliban** in Afghanistan, information collected and presented in a map by the Long War Journal (LWJ) was used in this report, alongside additional sources researched to the extent possible to corroborate the LWJ findings. One of these additional sources is Bilal Sarwary, an independent Afghan journalist based in Kabul, who was BBC correspondent on Afghanistan for more than thirteen years. Bilal Sarwary gives regular updates on the shifting frontlines on his Twitter account with information gathered from his sources in the field.⁴⁸

The LWJ is a project by the non-profit policy institute the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD).⁴⁹ The LWJ’s Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan is based on open-source information, such as press reports and information provided by government agencies and the Taliban. The LWJ classifies the level of control as follows:

“‘Unconfirmed” district [...] has some level of claim-of-control made by the Taliban, but either has not yet been—or cannot be— independently verified by LWJ research. A “Contested” district may mean that the government may be in control of the district center, but little else, and the Taliban controls large areas or all of the areas outside of the district center. A “Controlled” district may mean the Taliban is openly administering a district, providing services and security, and also running the local courts.’⁵⁰

On **internal displacement**, the main source used is the ‘Internal Displacement due to Conflict’ data collection by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). The UNOCHA data reported in the displacement sections was extracted on the ‘accessed date’ indicated in the Bibliography.

⁴⁷ ACLED, Curated data, Coverage notices, [url](#); See also: Clark, K., War in Afghanistan in 2020: Just as much violence, but no one wants to talk about it, 16 August 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], n.d., [url](#); Sarwary B., [LinkedIn], n.d., [url](#); Intercept (The), Bilal Sarwary, 8 January 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁹ LWJ, About us, n.d. [url](#)

⁵⁰ More information on the methodology used by LWJ can be found at: LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, Methodology, n.d., [url](#)

Structure and use of the report

This report is not meant to be read as a whole. In the first part a [general description](#) is given on the security situation in Afghanistan including a geographical overview, which is then explained in greater detail in the second part, holding a [regional description](#) of geographic subdivisions (Kabul City and 34 provinces).

Provinces and districts

The provincial chapters in this report are organised alphabetically and have the following structure: a general description of the province contains information on the geography and population; the conflict background takes a longer term look at the security situation in a province, including the armed actors active in the province. A section on recent trends in the security situation describes the nature of the violence, targets, locations, and casualties within the timeframe from 1 January 2020 – 31 May 2021. Recent security incidents described in sub-sections should be read as illustrations of trends in the security situation and not as an exhaustive list of incidents. Finally, conflict-induced displacements are described in a separate section.

Both the general and regional sections provide information from various sources on the relevant elements and indicators. Information on an indicator as such should never be taken as conclusive but as indicative for protection assessment and is to be read together with all other indicators and information on the region (or province, district).

There are a number of provinces and districts for which the administrative boundaries are unclear. For example, it is unclear whether the district of Gizab belongs to Uruzgan or Daykundi province.⁵¹ Nor is it clear whether the district of Gormach belongs to Badghis or Faryab province.⁵²

The Managing Director at Alcis, a company providing geographic information services with many years of experience in Afghanistan, contacted by OFPRA's Information, Documentation and Research Division, stated in an e-mail in August 2017 that

‘there is not one unified agreed district and province boundary dataset currently in use. There are various ‘official’ versions. [...] The boundaries within these different datasets have changed over time. Some districts have been passed across to other provinces for administrative purposes. Some new districts have been created over time. Some areas within Afghanistan are still referred to as districts by locals of the area, even though they have never had boundaries created for them and never been treated as a district.’⁵³

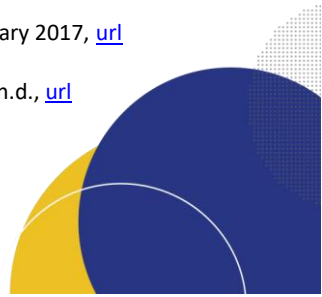
In absence of an official list of districts, EASO chooses in principle to follow the administrative divisions of the provinces used by UNOCHA, as they produce very clear maps and use the same division systematically in all their publications.⁵⁴

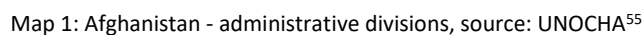
⁵¹ Norway, Landinfo, Respons. Afghanistan: Gizab-distriktet, 11 December 2014, [url](#)

⁵² Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

⁵³ Brittan, R., Managing Director Alcis, e-mail to OFPRA, 16 August 2017

⁵⁴ All relevant maps on Afghanistan by UNOCHA can be found at: UNOCHA, Maps/Infographics – Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#)





24



1. General description of the security situation in Afghanistan

1.1 Background of the conflict

1.1.1 Overview of conflicts in Afghanistan

On 27 April 1978, during the so-called *Saur Revolution*, the Afghan communists came to power⁵⁶, and President Muhammad Daud Khan was overthrown by young officers of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (*Hezb-e Dimokratik-e Khalq-e Afghanistan*⁵⁷, PDPA) a small 'Marxist-Leninist party'⁵⁸ established on 1 January 1965 in Kabul by *Khalq* and *Parcham* as two main factions opposing each other,⁵⁹ in a military coup. President Daud and most of his family members were executed during the revolution.⁶⁰ Daud had ruled the country since 1973. Following the coup, Nur Muhammad Tarakai became the new president and Hafizullah Amin the deputy prime minister.⁶¹ The PDPA leaders called their coup the *Saur Revolution*, the month in the Afghan calendar in which the coup took place.⁶² During the military coup, around 60 to 70 tanks were deployed⁶³ by lieutenant-colonel Muhammad Rafi, and two battalion commanders, majors Muhammad Aslam Watanjar and Sherjan Mazduryar. Tanks were backed by fighter jets under the command of Colonel Abul Qader, chief of Air Force.⁶⁴

President Daud had several enemies [since he arrived in power in 1973]⁶⁵ and the coup was mainly triggered by the arrest of the PDPA leaders⁶⁶ including Amin and PDPA's top leader Nur Muhammad Tarakai, who were jailed⁶⁷ after protests erupted over the killing of PDPA party ideologue Mir Akbar Khayber on 17 April 1978.⁶⁸

Following the 1978 coup, tensions between *Khalq* and *Parcham* began. President Nur Muhammad Tarakai of *Khalq* cracked down on *Parcham*, detaining or killing hundreds of its members or supporters while its leaders were sent abroad as ambassadors including Karmal (*Parcham's* leader and deputy leader of PDPA).⁶⁹ Within the *Khalq* faction, due to an important quarrel between Amin and Tarakai, the latter was murdered in September 1979⁷⁰ and Amin took power.⁷¹

⁵⁶ Clark, K., An April Day that Changed Afghanistan 2: Afghans remember the 'Saur Revolution', AAN, 27 April 2018, updated 9 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁷ Qaane, E. and Sari Kouvo, Assadullah Sarwari Freed from Prison : What chances of war crimes trials in Afghanistan?, AAN, 6 January 2017, [url](#)

⁵⁸ Washington College of Law, American university, Afghanistan documentation project, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁹ Ruttig, T., An April day that changed Afghanistan 1: Four decades after the leftist takeover, AAN, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁰ Ruttig, T., An April day that changed Afghanistan 1: Four decades after the leftist takeover, AAN, 25 April 2018, [url](#); Washington College of Law, American university, Afghanistan documentation project, n.d., [url](#)

⁶¹ Qaane, E., Afghan war crimes trials in the Netherlands: Who are the suspects and what have been the outcomes?, AAN, 25 March 2020, [url](#); Washington College of Law, American university, Afghanistan documentation project, n.d., [url](#)

⁶² RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghanistan still facing aftershocks of 1978 communist coup, 27 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶³ ADST, The Saur Revolution: Prelude to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁴ Ruttig, T., An April day that changed Afghanistan 1: Four decades after the leftist takeover, AAN, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁵ ADST, The Saur Revolution: Prelude to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁶ Ruttig, T., An April day that changed Afghanistan 1: Four decades after the leftist takeover, AAN, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghanistan still facing aftershocks of 1978 communist coup, 27 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁸ Ruttig, T., An April day that changed Afghanistan 1: Four decades after the leftist takeover, AAN, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, The Afghan President (to be) who lived a secret life in a Czechoslovak forest, 4 November 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁰ Blood, P. R. (ed.), Afghanistan: A Country Study, Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2001, [url](#)

⁷¹ Qaane, E., Afghan war crimes trials in the Netherlands: Who are the suspects and what have been the outcomes?, AAN, 25 March 2020, [url](#); Blood, P. R. (ed.), Afghanistan: A Country Study. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2001, [url](#)

Immediately after the 1978 coup, the Department for the Protection of Afghanistan's Interests (*De Afghanistan de Gato Satelo Edara*, AGSA), an intelligence agency led by Assadullah Sarwari [*Khalqi*⁷²], was established,⁷³ and was mainly in charge of carrying out arrests and executions. President Tarakai reportedly announced in March 1979, 'those who plot against us in the dark will disappear in the dark'.⁷⁴

Following Amin's seizure of power, Workers Intelligence Agency (*Kargari Istikhabati Muassisaas*, KAM), was established in September 1979 and the State Intelligence Agency (*Khedamat-e Ettela'at-e Dawlati*, KHAD) was established with the help of KGB soon after Babrak Karmal's coup in December 1979.⁷⁵ In 1986, KHAD became WAD (*Wazarat-e Amniat-e Daulati*, State Security Ministry⁷⁶).⁷⁷

Between 1978 and 1979, *Khalq* incarcerated and executed almost 5 000 people, including some of them in *Pul-e Charkhi* prison,⁷⁸ whose names, profession, places of birth and crimes were indicated in a document known as 'death list'.⁷⁹ Victims were allegedly tortured including beatings and electrical shocks during the interrogation inside the prison.⁸⁰ While in power, the PDPA used torture and forced disappearance, and as well as the killing of civilians deliberately.⁸¹ According to a former prisoner, during the night prisoners were brought out of *Pul-e Charkhi* prison for execution and were buried [in mass] by a Bulldozer.⁸²

On 15 March 1979, an uprising (*qiam* in Dari) by rebels took place against the PDPA government in Herat province.⁸³ During the six-day uprising, Afghan pilots, trained by Russians, carried out airstrikes on the city to recapture it, which resulted in the killing of up to 25 000 people.⁸⁴ During the same period, the Afghan government assigned insurgent assassination squads to conduct house to house searches in Herat city.⁸⁵ In 1992, a mass grave of 2 000 people was discovered near Herat City, which may have belonged to the victims of the uprising incident of 1979.⁸⁶ In April 1979, the PDPA government forces led by Sadeq Alamyar carried out an attack on Kerala village in Kunar province against *mujahidin* groups⁸⁷, which caused an estimated number of civilians killed in this attack ranging up to 300⁸⁸ and 'between 600 to 1 200'.⁸⁹

⁷² AJP, Casting shadows: War crimes and crimes against humanity: 1978-2001, n.d., [url](#), p. 12

⁷³ Qaane, E., AAN, Afghan war crimes trials in the Netherlands: Who are the suspects and what have been the outcomes?, AAN, 25 March 2020, [url](#); AJP, Casting shadows: War crimes and crimes against humanity: 1978-2001, n.d., [url](#), p. 12

⁷⁴ P. Gossman, An April Day That Changed Afghanistan 3: The legacy of the Saur Revolution's war crimes, AAN, 30 April 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁵ Qaane, E., Afghan war crimes trials in the Netherlands: Who are the suspects and what have been the outcomes?, AAN, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶ Patang Wardak, D., Why the NDS matters : The emergence of the Afghan intelligence agency after 9/11, Journal of Intelligence and Terrorism Studies, 19 January 2017, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁷ AJP, Casting shadows: War crimes and crimes against humanity: 1978-2001, n.d., [url](#), p. 31

⁷⁸ Netherlands (The), Netherlands Public Prosecution Service, Afghanistan death lists, 18 September 2013, [url](#)

⁷⁹ Clark, K., Death list published: Families of disappeared end a 30 year wait for news, AAN, 26 September 2013, [url](#); AIHRC, Afghanistan death list to end uncertainty of relatives, 18 September 2013, [url](#)

⁸⁰ Netherlands (The), Netherlands Public Prosecution Service, Afghanistan death lists, 18 September 2013, [url](#)

⁸¹ Qaane, E., Afghan war crimes trials in the Netherlands: Who are the suspects and what have been the outcomes?, AAN, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

⁸² BBC News, Kabul's prison of death, 27 February 2006, [url](#)

⁸³ Gammell, C., Failings of inclusivity: The Herat uprising of March 1979, AAN, 15 March 2015, [url](#)

⁸⁴ Gammell, C., Failings of inclusivity: The Herat uprising of March 1979, AAN, 15 March 2015, [url](#)

⁸⁵ Washington Post (The), 'Grim' nickname fits Afghan tales of torture, murder, 11 May 1979, [url](#)

⁸⁶ Gammell, C., Failings of inclusivity: The Herat uprising of March 1979, AAN, 15 March 2015, [url](#)

⁸⁷ Clark, K., A 36-year wait for justice? Dutch arrest suspected Afghan war criminal, 1 November 2015, [url](#); Qaane, E.,

Afghan war crimes trials in the Netherlands: Who are the suspects and what have been the outcomes?, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸ Washington Post (The), 'Grim' nickname fits Afghan tales of torture, murder, 11 May 1979, [url](#)

⁸⁹ Qaane, E., Afghan war crimes trials in the Netherlands: Who are the suspects and what have been the outcomes?, AAN, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

On 25 December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and on 27 December of the same year,⁹⁰ the Soviet special forces attacked Taj Beg palace [in Kabul] and killed President Hafizullah Amin⁹¹ and his family members,⁹² and designated Babrak Karmal as the new President.⁹³ Amin was suspected of collaborating with CIA and the leader of *Hezb-e Islami*, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.⁹⁴

The Soviet Union undertook full military and political control in Kabul and in large areas across the country.⁹⁵ In early 1980, there were 81 000 Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan. In 1986, their number reached to 120 000. Before their withdrawal, which began in mid-1988 and was completed in 1989, the number of Soviet troops in Afghanistan was around 100 000.⁹⁶ After the Soviet withdrawal, Dr. Najibullah Ahmadzai, former head of KHAD,⁹⁷ who had taken power in 1986, remained in control of the government.⁹⁸

According to Ehsan Qaane, researcher at AAN, after the PDPA had taken power in 1978, four successive presidents governed the country: Nur Muhammad Tarakai (1978 - 1979), Hafizullah Amin (1979), Babrak Karmal (1979 - 1986), and Dr Najibullah (1987 - 1992).⁹⁹

After the collapse of Dr. Najibullah's regime in 1992, a period generally referred to as 'Civil War'¹⁰⁰ saw different *mujahideen* groups who had formed new alliances and fronts fighting for control of Afghanistan.¹⁰¹ *Mujahideen* factions were composed of *Jamiat-e Islami* led by Burhanuddin Rabbani; *Shura-i Nazar* (The Council of the North), led by Ahmad Shah Massoud; *Hezb-e Islami* (founded by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar); *Hezb-e Islami* of Khalis; *Ittihad-e Islami under the command of Abdul Rasul Sayyaf*; *Hezb-e Wahdat* created in 1989 as a union of Shia-Hazara parties and *Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami-Afghanistan* led by Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi Mohammad.¹⁰²

Between April 1992 and March 1993, the battle for Kabul between *mujahideen* factions and militias took place,¹⁰³ which was characterised by severe human rights breaches, including executions, imprisonment, sexual violence, abduction of women and forced marriages. Rape of women and girls was used by militia leaders as a weapon of war or 'rewarding' militants.¹⁰⁴ Around 25 000 people were killed.¹⁰⁵

From April 1992, *Hezb-e Islami* raided Kabul with rocket attacks destroying hundreds of homes and killing around 1 800 to 2 500 people. *Ittihad* and *Jamiat* troops, in retaliation, launched rockets on civilian residential areas while trying to target *Hezb-e Islami* positions in the South of Kabul. During the same period, *Wahdat* and *Ittihad* committed severe human rights violations while fighting each other including the abduction of Hazara people by *Ittihad* and the abduction of Pashtun, Tajik and

⁹⁰ Ruttig, T., A turning point in world history: 40 years ago, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, 25 December 2019, [url](#)

⁹¹ Ruttig, T., A turning point in world history: 40 years ago, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, 25 December 2019, [url](#)
RFE/RL, Poisoning, assassination, and a coup: the secret Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 27 December 2019, [url](#)

⁹² RFE/RL, Poisoning, assassination, and a coup: the secret Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 27 December 2019, [url](#)

⁹³ Ruttig, T., A turning point in world history: 40 years ago, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, 25 December 2019, [url](#)
RFE/RL, Poisoning, assassination, and a coup: the secret Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 27 December 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁴ Ruttig, T., An April day that changed Afghanistan 1: Four decades after the leftist takeover, AAN, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵ US, Office of the Historian, The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the U.S. response, 1778-1980, n.d., [url](#)

⁹⁶ Ruttig, T., A turning point in world history: 40 years ago, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, 25 December 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁷ HRW, Blood-stained hands, past atrocities in Kabul and Afghanistan's legacy of impunity, 6 July 2005, [url](#)

⁹⁸ HRW, Blood-stained hands, past atrocities in Kabul and Afghanistan's legacy of impunity, 6 July 2005, [url](#)

⁹⁹ Qaane, E., Afghan war crimes trials in the Netherlands: Who are the suspects and what have been the outcomes?, AAN, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ BBC News, Afghanistan profile – Timeline, updated on: 9 September 2019, [url](#); HRW, Afghanistan: Crisis of Impunity, July 2001, [url](#), pp. 13-17; International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland, 27 June 2011, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰¹ HRW, Afghanistan: Crisis of Impunity, July 2001, [url](#), pp. 13-17; International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland, 27 June 2011, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁰² AJP, Casting shadows: War crimes and crimes against humanity: 1978-2001, n.d., [url](#), pp. 57, 59, 66, 82, 88 and 163

¹⁰³ HRW, III. The Battle for Kabul: April 1992 – March 1993, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ Oxfam International, The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009, November 2009, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁰⁵ Dorronsoro, G., Kabul at War (1992-1996): State, Ethnicity and Social Classes, South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal, 2007, n.d., [url](#)

other non Hazara by *Wahdat*. For instance, Shafi Diwana (Shafi the mad), a senior commander of *Wahdat* tortured and killed prisoners in Qala Khana in Kabul. *Wahdat* also reportedly held thousands of prisoners in Dasht-e Barchi area in Kabul, most of whom reportedly disappeared.¹⁰⁶

During the civil war, troops belonging to *Junbesh-e Mili* led by Dostum and stationed in the *Naqlia* base (on the road between Kart-e Nau and Shah Shahid areas in Kabul) allegedly committed ‘rape, murder and looting’, notably in 1993.¹⁰⁷

Conflict between *mujahideen* factions led to the emergence in 1994 of a group called the Taliban.¹⁰⁸ The group was made up of Afghan *mujahideen*, or Islamic rebel fighters, who had fought the Soviet occupation.¹⁰⁹ Jalaluddin Haqqani, the founder of Haqqani Network, allied with the Taliban in the mid-1990s. He served as Taliban’s Minister for Tribal and Border Affairs.¹¹⁰

The Taliban conquered Kabul in 1996¹¹¹ and after entering the city the group killed President Najibullah and his brother and hanged them in Ariana circle in the city,¹¹² and they carried out ‘public executions and amputations of one hand and one foot for theft’.¹¹³ They killed thousands of people¹¹⁴ including the deliberate and systematic killing of Hazara ethnic civilians after the group captured Mazar-e Sharif on 8 August 1998.¹¹⁵ They captured Bamyan province in May 1999,¹¹⁶ where the group destroyed two giant Buddhas statues in March 2001.¹¹⁷

By 2001, the Taliban controlled most of the Afghan territory. But by the end of the year, because of the 11 September attacks in the US, they were ousted by a US-led military operation.¹¹⁸ The US gave its support to the *mujahideen* front opposing the Taliban, at that time known as Northern Alliance.¹¹⁹

In December 2001, based on the Bonn Agreement, an Afghan interim government was formed, led by Hamid Karzai¹²⁰, a Pashtun¹²¹, who also won the first presidential elections in October 2004.¹²² The Taliban had reorganised and increased their presence substantially by 2006 in Wardak, Logar, Zabul and Uruzgan provinces and began expanding along the western edge of Kabul province.¹²³ Other anti-government elements (AGEs) operating in Afghanistan included Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG), the Haqqani Network¹²⁴ and Al Qaeda affiliates, including Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LeT), Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LeJ) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).¹²⁵ This insurgency was characterised by mainly asymmetric warfare: AGEs used roadside and

¹⁰⁶ HRW, Blood-stained hands: Past atrocities in Kabul and Afghanistan’s legacy of impunity, 6 July 2005, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ AJP, Casting shadows: War crimes and crimes against humanity: 1978-2001, n.d., [url](#), p. 103

¹⁰⁸ Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, January 2012, [url](#), p. 22.

¹⁰⁹ CFR, The Taliban in Afghanistan, 15 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ ASP, The Haqqani Network, the Shadow Group Supporting the Taliban’s Operations, 1 September 2020, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹¹ International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 27 June 2011, [url](#), p. 4; Tolonews, Researchers blame Pakistan’s ISI for death of ex-president, 19 October 2016, [url](#)

¹¹² Tolonews, Researchers blame Pakistan’s ISI for death of ex-president, 19 October 2016, [url](#)

¹¹³ USDOS, Afghanistan Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996, 30 January 1997, [url](#)

¹¹⁴ AI, Afghanistan, Making human rights the agenda, 1 November 2001, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ AI, Afghanistan: Thousands of civilians killed following Taleban takeover of Mazar-e Sharif, 3 September 1998, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ BBC News, The man who helped blow up the Bamiyan Buddhas, 12 March 2015, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ New York Times (The), Afghanistan dispatch, 2 giant Buddhas survived 1,500 years, Fragments, graffiti and a hologram remain, 18 June 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ CFR, The Taliban in Afghanistan, 15 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 27 June 2011, [url](#), p. 5

¹²⁰ Oxfam International, The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009, November 2009, [url](#), p. 13; UNAMA, Eighth Anniversary Today of 2001 Afghan Interim Authority, 22 December 2009, [url](#)

¹²¹ Guardian (The), The Afghan interim government: who’s who, 6 December 2001, [url](#)

¹²² New York Times (The), Election of Karzai Is Declared Official, 4 November 2004, [url](#)

¹²³ International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 27 June 2011, [url](#), pp. 6-7

¹²⁴ International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 27 June 2011, [url](#), pp. 14-15

¹²⁵ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/68/910-S/2014/420, 18 June 2014, [url](#), para 21

suicide bombs and complex attacks, intimidation of civilians and targeted killings to destabilise the country. This was countered by searches, clearance operations and bombings by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and international military forces.¹²⁶ According to the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), the security situation deteriorated after 2005. The conflict deepened throughout 2007 and 2008, directly affecting around a third of the country.¹²⁷

From 2010 onwards, the Taliban-led insurgency spread from the country's south into areas in the northern, eastern, western, and central regions of Afghanistan.¹²⁸ By the end of 2014, a transition of security responsibility from the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) was completed. The support for the further development of the ANDSF continued 'under a new, smaller non-combat NATO-led mission ("Resolute Support")'.¹²⁹ After the 2014 international military withdrawal, the Taliban have rapidly expanded their presence countrywide.¹³⁰ A 2017 report by UN Secretary-General noted that the Taliban had been able to control larger parts of the country and the emergence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant - Khorasan Province (ISKP) added 'a new, dangerous dimension' to the situation.¹³¹ In 2018, fighting intensified particularly in the east, south-east and in some areas within the south. The Taliban 'made territorial gains in sparsely populated areas, and advanced their positions in areas that had not seen fighting in years'.¹³² Human Rights Watch noted that although the Taliban claimed to target government and foreign military facilities only, their indiscriminate use of force killed and injured hundreds of civilians.¹³³

On 29 February 2020, after more than 18 years of conflict, the US and the Taliban signed an 'agreement for bringing peace' to Afghanistan.¹³⁴ During the 'reduction in violence' (RiV) week, from 22 to 28 February 2020,¹³⁵ a drop in security incidents was recorded between the pro-government forces and the Taliban.¹³⁶ However, after the RiV ended with the signature of the Doha agreement, the Taliban stated that the war would continue not against foreign troops, but against the Afghan government.¹³⁷ The Taliban's Military Commission reportedly sought assurances from the main Taliban leadership (the Quetta Shura) that they could continue fighting regardless of the agreement.¹³⁸ Violence resumed immediately after the RiV ended.¹³⁹ On 12 September 2020, the first formal and direct peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban started in Doha.¹⁴⁰

¹²⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2014, July 2014, [url](#), pp. 54, 56, 58, 59

¹²⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2008, January 2009, [url](#), p. 1

¹²⁸ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, (Reporting Period: 1 September 2010 – 31 December 2014), S/2015/336, 15 May 2015, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁹ NATO, Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead, updated 17 November 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁰ International Crisis Group, Afghanistan: Growing Challenges, 30 April 2017, [url](#)

¹³¹ UN Security Council, Special report on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/312–S/2017/696, 10 August 2017, [url](#), p. 3

¹³² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 8

¹³³ HRW, World Report 2019 - Afghanistan, 17 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁴ BBC News, Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18-year war, 29 February 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, First Quarter Report: 1 January- 31 March 2020, June 2020, [url](#), p. 3

¹³⁶ AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended? 21 March 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁷ AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended? 21 March 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 4

¹³⁹ Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ USIP, Five things to know about the Afghan peace talks, 14 September 2020, [url](#)

1.1.2 Political landscape

The disputed 2014 presidential election resulted in a political compromise which led to the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG), under President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. Divisions within the government, particularly between Ghani and Abdullah and their camps, severely compromised the NUG's effectiveness.¹⁴¹ According to an Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) report from January 2017, 'its complex power-sharing arrangements [have] paralysed governance in Afghanistan.'¹⁴² A series of violent events in Kabul in May-June 2017 caused a political crisis, resulting in a 'significant shift in the political climate' marked by a rift between President Ghani and key members of the Jamiat-e Islami party. The crisis also resulted in the consolidation of power within the NUG around President Ghani¹⁴³ and in the first eight months of 2017, the government made progress on high-level appointments, which had previously been a source of tension.¹⁴⁴

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) set a date for the next parliamentary and district council elections in July 2018,¹⁴⁵ which had been set to take place in early 2015. However, as a result of security challenges and voter registration reforms the long-delayed parliamentary elections were rescheduled again to October 2018.¹⁴⁶ Parliamentary elections were held in 32 provinces on 20-21 October 2018.¹⁴⁷ Voting in Kandahar was delayed by a week after the assassination of the provincial police chief in a Taliban-claimed attack two days before the original date of the elections.¹⁴⁸ Voting in Ghazni was postponed indefinitely due to security issues and disagreements around constituencies.¹⁴⁹

Although voter turnout in Kabul and other urban centres was reportedly high, technical and organisational problems occurred at some of the roughly 4 900 polling stations across the country. In some polling stations machines registering fingerprints and portrait photos aiming to prevent double voting did not function properly while in others election staff had difficulties handling them.¹⁵⁰

In December 2018, the IEC announced a three-month delay for the presidential election which was originally scheduled for 20 April 2019.¹⁵¹ In March 2019, the elections were postponed again, due to 'problems with the voting process'.¹⁵² Presidential candidates included incumbent Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, former national security adviser Muhammad Hanif Atmar and also Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of *Hezb-e Islami*.¹⁵³ Interior Minister Amrullah Saleh, once a strong critic of the President, stepped down from his position to join Ghani's team as a candidate for the post of vice-president.¹⁵⁴ Appointing Saleh was seen as an effort from the ethnic Pashtun Ghani

¹⁴¹ FP, NUG One Year On: Struggling to Govern, 29 September 2015, [url](#)

¹⁴² AAN, What to Watch? Key issues to follow in Afghanistan in 2017, 27 January 2017, updated 9 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴³ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/392-S/2017/783, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁴ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/71/932-S/2017/508, 15 June 2017, [url](#), p. 2; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/392-S/2017/783, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴⁵ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/392-S/2017/783, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁴⁶ Al Jazeera, Afghanistan's elections: All you need to know, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ Tolonews, Ghazni Elections Could Be Held With Presidential Elections, updated 28 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸ CNN, Kandahar goes to the polls in Afghan parliamentary vote delayed by violence, 27 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ Tolonews, Ghazni Elections Could Be Held With Presidential Elections, 27 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ Diplomat (The), Afghan Parliamentary Elections Marred by Technical Troubles and Insecurity, 21 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ France24, Afghan presidential election delayed until July 20, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵² Reuters, Afghanistan presidential election postponed to September, 20 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵³ Adili, A. Y., Afghanistan's 2019 elections (2): Who is running to become the next president?, AAN, 11 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan Presidential Race Takes Shape as Ghani's Challengers Emerge, 18 January 2019, [url](#)

to neutralise a political opponent and to get the support of the Tajiks, among whom Saleh has a strong backing.¹⁵⁵

On 28 September 2019, the presidential elections were finally held, with the lowest election turnout recorded since the Taliban were ousted in 2001. In the immediate aftermath of the elections, both frontrunners, incumbent Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, declared victory¹⁵⁶, which resulted in several months of political impasse.¹⁵⁷ After almost three months since the elections, and with delays following allegations of fraud, irregularities, attacks and technical problems with biometric devices used for voting¹⁵⁸, on 22 December 2019, the IEC announced the preliminary results showing 50.64 % of the votes (923 868) in favour of Ghani and 39.52 % of the votes (720 990) in favour of Abdullah Abdullah. This latter rejected the preliminary results, stating they were based on fraud.¹⁵⁹ The election turnover was estimated to be over 1.8 million¹⁶⁰, with 31.5 % being composed of women.¹⁶¹

After three days since the announcement of the preliminary results, IEC said that it had registered around 16 500 complaints.¹⁶² The final results were announced in February 2020, confirming almost exactly the preliminary outcome.¹⁶³ Incumbent Muhammad Ashraf Ghani was declared the winner, with 50.64 % of votes. His rival Abdullah Abdullah, who was second with 39.52 % of votes¹⁶⁴, rejected the results, declaring himself the winner¹⁶⁵; he announced his intention to form an alternative, 'inclusive' government, and in the following weeks started appointing some provincial governors.¹⁶⁶ On 9 March 2020, both Ghani and Abdullah held separate inauguration ceremonies taking the oath of office as the president of Afghanistan.¹⁶⁷

After months of tension, on 17 May 2020, President Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, finally signed a new power-sharing agreement.¹⁶⁸ Under agreement, Abdullah is to lead the peace negotiations, becoming the leader of the High Council of National Reconciliation (HCNR) with executive authorities;¹⁶⁹ in addition he has the right to appoint 50 % of the cabinet¹⁷⁰, including for some key ministries, while provincial governors will be appointed based on 'a rule agreed upon by the two sides'. However, as of 13 June 2020, AAN's researcher Ali Yawar Adili and co-Director Thomas Ruttig observed that it was not clear yet whether such a rule had been put in place, noting that a cabinet had yet to be fully formed.¹⁷¹ On 6 December 2020, Ali Yawar Adili and Rohullah Soroush, researchers at AAN, indicated that 25 cabinet nominees were presented to the *Wolosi Jirga* for confirmation including 14 from Ghani's side and 11 from Abdullah's side. *Wolosi Jirga* reportedly confirmed 20 including 19 ministers and the head of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) (the country's

¹⁵⁵ Reuters, Afghanistan's Ghani launches bid for second presidential term, 20 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶ BBC News, Afghanistan presidential election: Rivals declare victory after record low turnout, 30 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷ Adili A. Y., End of post-election impasse? Ghani and Abdullah's new power-sharing formula, AAN 20 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ Reuters, Afghan election runoff likely amid thousands of complaints: officials, 23 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹ Reuters, Afghanistan's Ghani claims narrow win in preliminary presidential vote results, 22 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰ Reuters, Afghan election runoff likely amid thousands of complaints: officials, 23 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/753-S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶² Adili, A. Y., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (28): ECC starts final, decisive phase of complaints procedure, AAN, 25 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶³ Ruttig T., Afghanistan's 2019 Elections (30): Final results... and parallel governments?, AAN, 19 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ IEC, Afghanistan 2019, Presidential election, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ Ruttig T., Afghanistan's 2019 Elections (30): Final results... and parallel governments?, AAN, 19 February 2020, [url](#);

Reuters, Ghani named winner of disputed Afghan poll, rival also claims victory, 18 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/753-S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁶⁷ New York Times (the), Ghani Takes the Oath of Afghan President. His Rival Does, Too, 9 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸ Adili, A. Y., End of post-election impasse? Ghani and Abdullah's new power-sharing formula, AAN, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ Tolonews, Ghani and Abdullah Sign Agreement to Break Political Deadlock, 17 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰ Adili, A. Y., End of post-election impasse? Ghani and Abdullah's new power-sharing formula, AAN, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ Adili, A. Y. and Ruttig, T., Between Professionalism and Accommodation: The slow progress on the new cabinet, AAN, 13 June 2020, [url](#)

intelligence and security service), and the five others were rejected including four ministers and the head of central bank. The five that were rejected (four ministerial nominees, plus the head of the central bank) were all from Ghani's electoral camp.¹⁷²

Since March 2020, new provincial governors were appointed for 26 of the 34 provinces including for Baghlan, Sar-e Pul, Kandahar, Jowzjan and Logar Provinces in December 2020 and January 2021. Reportedly, 'on 6 December 2020, nine women were appointed as second deputy provincial governors for social and economic affairs, in Badghis, Ghazni, Laghman, Logar, Kapisa, Kunar, Nimruz, Nuristan and Zabul'.¹⁷³

1.1.3 Peace talks

After exploratory peace talks in Doha between the US and Taliban representatives collapsed in June 2013, talks did not resume before the new president, Ashraf Ghani, was inaugurated in September 2014.¹⁷⁴ In January 2015, the Taliban stated that its preconditions for entering peace talks were the end of foreign military presence, the establishment of an Islamic government and the implementation of *sharia*.¹⁷⁵ After the death of Mullah Omar was revealed in July 2015, a power struggle broke out within the Taliban which, at least in part, prevented further progress in the peace talks.¹⁷⁶

In January 2016, the Taliban refused to engage in peace process within the Coordination Group constituted by the US, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China aimed at advancing the peace talks.¹⁷⁷ In September 2016, the government signed a peace deal with Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG). Describing HIG as a 'fading insurgent group', Borhan Osman explained the likely effect of this deal on the battlefield as 'unlikely to significantly lower the current levels of violence'.¹⁷⁸ In June 2017, President Ghani, speaking at the 'Kabul-process', 'an international conference aiming to set the stage for peace talks and restore security in Afghanistan', offered the Taliban a 'last chance' for reconciliation.¹⁷⁹ However, according to a September 2017 report of the UN Secretary-General 'no discernible progress has been made in fostering negotiations between the Government and the Taliban'.¹⁸⁰

In February 2018, the Afghan government presented 'some very concrete proposals for peace talks with the Taliban' which, according to AAN, was 'the most complete peace offer that has been publicly announced since 2001'. Although President Ghani's peace plan was offered 'without any preconditions', it was made clear that issues as women's rights and the basic values of the constitution would not be negotiated. While the proposal included the prospect of establishing a Taliban office in Kabul, the possibility of a ceasefire and also lifting the sanctions on those Taliban leaders who would join the negotiation, the Taliban, in their reply, accused Ghani of 'missing the point' namely their key demand on the withdrawal of foreign troops.¹⁸¹ In June 2018, 'President

¹⁷² Adili, A. Y. and Soroush, R., Afghanistan's new – but still incomplete cabinet: no end yet to acting ministers, AAN, 6 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/811–S/2021/252, 12 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁴ Farrell, T. and Michael Semple, Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, RUSI, January 2017, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁷⁵ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/69/801–S/2015/151, 27 February 2015, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁷⁶ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, RUSI, January 2017, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁷⁷ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, RUSI, January 2017, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁷⁸ Osman, B., Peace With Hekmatyar: What does it mean for battlefield and politics?, AAN, 29 September 2016, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹ DW, Ashraf Ghani offers Taliban 'last chance' for peace, 6 June 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/72/392–S/2017/783, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁸¹ Bjelica, J. and Ruttig, T., Who shall cease the fire first? Afghanistan's peace offer to the Taleban, AAN, 1 March 2018, updated 9 March 2020, [url](#)

Ghani called a unilateral halt to all offensive government actions' over the Muslim holiday of *Eid al-Fitr* which the Taliban also joined.¹⁸² However, the Taliban rejected the President's offer to extend the ceasefire by three months and continued to refuse official negotiations with the Afghan government.¹⁸³

On 21 September 2018, Zalmay Khalilzad was nominated as the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation¹⁸⁴ and with Russia hosting a meeting in November 2018 on the peace process that was attended by 11 countries and by the Taliban as well.¹⁸⁵ Both tracks of negotiations continued in 2019. The Moscow meeting in the beginning of February 2019 brought together the Taliban delegation led by chief negotiator, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai and senior Afghan politicians led by former President Hamid Karzai. The talks were scheduled just a week after the US and the Taliban finished six days of negotiations in Doha.¹⁸⁶

According to Thomas Ruttig, co-Director of AAN, while in Doha progress was being made in the form of an agreed draft framework, the negotiations so far did not involve the Afghan government, one of the main three parties to the conflict, since their inclusion is blocked by the Taliban.¹⁸⁷ The next round of talks in Doha, the highest level negotiations yet, began on 25 February 2019 between the insurgent group and the US involving Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban's deputy leader.¹⁸⁸

A consultative *Loya Jirga* – a gathering of Afghan politicians and tribal, ethnic and religious leaders – was initially planned to be held in Kabul in March 2019 with the goal of creating a framework for the Afghan government to engage in peace negotiations with the Taliban. The *Loya Jirga* was eventually postponed.¹⁸⁹ In April 2019, a four-day *Loya Jirga* was convened to reach out a humanised approach to peace talks with the Taliban, while the latter group refused to negotiate with the Afghan government.¹⁹⁰ In September 2019, US President Donald Trump declared the US-Taliban negotiations 'dead'¹⁹¹, after the Taliban killed a US soldier; however, the discussions between the two sides resumed within weeks behind the scenes.¹⁹²

On 29 February 2020, in Doha, the US and the Taliban signed the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan.¹⁹³ The main points outlined in the Doha agreement include guarantees by the Taliban on not providing protection to groups, such as Al Qaeda, that pose a threat to the US and its allies; guarantees by the US and their NATO allies to withdraw from Afghanistan; the question of ceasefire

¹⁸² Clark, K., The Eid Ceasefire: Allowing Afghans to imagine their country at peace, AAN, 19 June 2018, updated 9 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸³ Ruttig, T., Getting to the Steering Wheel: President Ghani's new set of peace proposals, AAN, 4 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴ USDOS, Zalmay Khalilzad - Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, 21 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, February 2019, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁸⁶ New York Times (The), In Moscow, Afghan Peace Talks Without the Afghan Government, 4 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ Ruttig, T., "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed": First steps in Afghan peace negotiations, AAN, 4 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ New York Times (The), U.S. and Taliban Begin Highest-Level Talks Yet on Ending Afghan War, 25 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹ RFE/RL, Afghan Loya Jirga Aimed At Discussing Peace Talks Delayed, 3 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ RFE/RL, Afghanistan opens Loya Jirga to discuss peace talks, 29 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹¹ Ruttig T., US-Taliban Agreement Still in the Air: Disputes about a 'ceasefire' versus 'reduction of violence', AAN, 30 January 2020, updated 9 April 2020 [url](#)

¹⁹² BBC News, Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18-year war, 29 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹³ The full text in English of the US-Taliban agreement, referred in this report as the 'Doha agreement', is available on the AAN website: Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America, 29 February 2019, [url](#). For a detailed explanation of the Doha Agreement and stipulations, see UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7

and the intra-Afghan negotiations.¹⁹⁴ However, the Afghan government was not involved in the deal leading to questions about the viability of the agreement.¹⁹⁵

Simultaneously with the Doha Agreement, the US signed a joint declaration¹⁹⁶ with the government of Afghanistan, as an attempt to involve the Afghan government in the discussions, enabling political settlement and a permanent ceasefire, while also re-affirming continued support to the Afghan security forces and refraining from intervention in domestic affairs, amongst others.¹⁹⁷

According to the Doha Agreement, all foreign military forces should withdraw from Afghanistan over a 14-month period, divided into two phases, including 135 days with partial reduction of troops and another 9.5 months with potential full withdrawal, while in exchange, there should be mechanisms to prevent Afghanistan being used by group/individual security threats to the US and its allies (specifically the Taliban and Al Qaeda).¹⁹⁸ The Agreement also stipulates that the modalities for a permanent ceasefire are to be negotiated in intra-Afghan negotiations, with a mutual release of prisoners, as a measure for confidence-building. Under the deal, the Afghan government is to release up to 5 000 Taliban prisoners, in exchange for up to 1 000 Afghan government related prisoners,¹⁹⁹ including soldiers and police officers held by the Taliban. The prisoners release is described as a 'core demand of the Taliban' and a delicate issue for the intra-Afghan talks.²⁰⁰ AAN observed that there are 'few obligations' placed on the Taliban in the Agreement.²⁰¹ The prospect of the release of Taliban prisoners also led to concerns of a return to violence.²⁰²

As of mid-June 2020, the Afghan government said to have released 3 000 prisoners, while the Taliban has freed 500. President Ghani also announced the decision to release additional 2 000 in order to pave the way for peace talks with the Taliban.²⁰³ However, as of June 2020, there was reluctance among both Afghan and Western officials about releasing hundreds of Taliban prisoners considered as particularly dangerous²⁰⁴ and in July 2020, the Afghan government announced that it will not release 600 'too dangerous' prisoners'.²⁰⁵ In September 2020, 100 'dangerous' Taliban prisoners were reportedly released by the government.²⁰⁶

According to the UN Security Council, reporting in May 2020:

¹⁹⁴ Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America, available at: AAN, 29 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ US CRS, Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief, 1 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 3, 7. For a further discussion of the deal's provisions, see also Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶ The text (in English) of the Joint Declaration between the US and the Afghanistan government is available at AAN, Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan, 29 February 2020 [url](#)

¹⁹⁷ Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸ Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America, available from: AAN, 29 February 2020, [url](#) p. 2

Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America, available from: AAN, 29 February 2020, [url](#) p. 2

²⁰⁰ Zeino E., Peace versus Democracy? Afghanistan between Government Crisis and a U.S. Peace Deal with the Taliban, Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁰¹ Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁰² Afghanistan Times, More violence feared as freed Taliban inmates may return to the battlefield, 14 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰³ RFE/RL, Afghan President Says Taliban Prisoner Release To Be Completed Soon, 11 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ Reuters, West reluctant for 'dangerous' Taliban prisoners to be freed: sources, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁵ France24, Afghanistan says will not release 600 'too dangerous' Taliban, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ RFE/RL, Afghan government releases 100 'dangerous' Taliban prisoners', 1 September 2020, [url](#)



‘While the Taliban remain internally disciplined enough to be a formidable fighting force, there are divisions within the group, which make compromise with its adversaries difficult, and its messaging remains hard-line. The group also appears well prepared for the 2020 fighting season and raising the tempo of its attacks on Afghan government targets while trying to avoid provoking the United States. Differences in interpretation of the agreement could lead to periodic crises in its implementation. Hard-line Taliban believe that they can and will still achieve their aims by force.’²⁰⁷

In mid-June 2020, the Taliban and the Afghan government finally agreed on Doha as the venue for their first session of high-level ‘intra-Afghan dialogue’,²⁰⁸ but held off confirmation due to disagreements over prisoner releases.²⁰⁹ The release of 5 000 Taliban prisoners by the Afghan government²¹⁰ opened the way to a first formal and direct peace talk between the Afghan government and the Taliban in Doha that began on 12 September 2020.²¹¹ AAN published the English translation of the biographies of the Taliban negotiations team headed by Sheikh Mawlawi Abdul Hakim Saheb, who is ‘currently a member of the Leadership Council [known as Quetta Council]’.²¹² Taliban also published the list themselves.²¹³ AAN also published an English translation of intra-Afghan talks rules of procedure (original in Pashto and Dari).²¹⁴ During the intra-Afghan talks, the Taliban demanded the establishment of a strict Islamic government while the Afghan government’s highest priority was the implementation of a ceasefire.²¹⁵ The Taliban demanded to implement Hanafi school of Sunni jurisprudence as the main source of legislation in the country in the future.²¹⁶ According to the UN Security Council, reporting on 3 February 2021, the peace process was important to ‘suppressing the long-term threat’ of ISKP and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.²¹⁷ According to Salaam Times, a news website sponsored by the US armed forces, there has been a growing division between the Taliban’s military commanders on the ground and the Doha political team.²¹⁸ According to a German Federal Government February 2021 report, the peace process with the Taliban ‘remain extremely fragile’ and has been ‘overshadowed by a sustained high level of violence’.²¹⁹

1.1.4 International context

As part of the bilateral agreement signed between the US and the Taliban on 29 February 2020, the US agreed to reduce their troops from over 12 000 to 8 600 within 135 days (by mid-July 2020); NATO and other coalition forces would also reduce their presence proportionally; with the commitment of a total withdrawal of all US and NATO troops within 14 months (by April 2021),

²⁰⁷ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3

²⁰⁸ Reuters, Afghan government, Taliban agree to Doha as venue for first peace talks, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁹ VOA, Prisoner Release Delays May Jeopardize Start of Intra-Afghan Negotiations, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan peace talks begin this week. Here’s what to know, 10 September 2020, [url](#)

²¹¹ USIP, Five things to know about the Afghan peace talks, 14 September 2020, [url](#)

²¹² AAN, Translation of the biographies of the Taleban negotiation team, 21 September 2020, [url](#)

²¹³ Voice of Jihad, Brief introduction of the members of negotiation team of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 30 September 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴ AAN, The rules of procedure for intra-Afghan talks, 2 January 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁵ New York Times (The), What to know about the Afghan peace talks, updated 15 February 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁶ SCR, December 2020 Monthly Forecast - Afghanistan, 30 November 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁷ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 3

²¹⁸ Salaam Times, Growing intra-Taliban feud threatens to unravel peace process, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁹ Germany, the Federal Government, Bundeswehr mission in Afghanistan to be extended, 24 February 2021, [url](#)

depending on 'action on the obligations' by the Taliban.²²⁰ On 18 June 2020, the US stated they had fulfilled their commitment under the Doha Agreement of reducing their troops in Afghanistan to 8 600. As for the timeframe set for the full withdrawal of all US and foreign troops, US General Frank McKenzie, who oversees US forces in the region, said it was an 'aspirational' commitment that would hinge on certain actions on the part of the Taliban.²²¹ In November 2020, the US troops in Afghanistan reduced to an estimated number of 4 000 to 5 000, and in January 2021 their number was decreased to 2 500²²² or, by other accounts, 3 500.²²³ A part of the current remaining US troops in Afghanistan would focus, in coordination with the Afghan forces, to fight against al-Qaeda and ISKP, and the rest of the US troops would continue providing training, advise, and assistance to the Afghan security forces as part of NATO-Resolute Support (RS). As of February 2021, in addition to these US troops, there were 6 346 US contractors in Afghanistan.²²⁴

In August 2020, Kate Clark reported that since the Doha agreement of February 2020, the US military was less involved in direct conflict in Afghanistan.²²⁵ According to the US Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS) report of 30 September 2020, in general the Taliban stopped their offensives against the US troops and interests in Afghanistan while the group has intensified its attacks against the ANDSF.²²⁶

In June 2020, NATO said they would reduce their troops from around 16 000 to around 12 000 during the course of the following months, in a 'step-by-step and conditions-based process, reflecting the progress seen on the ground'. At the same time, NATO Allies and Resolute Support Mission confirmed their financial support to the Afghan security forces until the end of 2020.²²⁷

As of February 2021, the number of NATO in Afghanistan was 9 592 and in total, 36 countries contributed troops to RS, with the US, Germany and the UK as the largest contributors.²²⁸ NATO did not decide on the withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan.²²⁹ In February 2021, Germany announced that it has extended its mission within RS to 31 January 2022, which has yet to be approved by the parliament.²³⁰ In March 2021, the German Parliament reportedly approved the mission.²³¹

As in the past, Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan were tense in 2016-2017²³² and remained tenuous in 2018.²³³ Both countries have been blaming each other for sheltering terrorists²³⁴ and escalating border tensions resulted in Pakistan starting to build a fence on the border to prevent the movement of militants.²³⁵ The US Department of Defense (USDOD) noted that even though Pakistani

²²⁰ Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America, available from: AAN, 29 February 2020, [url](#) p. 2

²²¹ AP, US has hit agreed troop-cut target of 8,600 in Afghanistan, 18 June 2010, [url](#)

²²² SIGAR, 2021 HIGH-Risk list, [url](#), March 2021, p. 14

²²³ New York Times (The), US has 1 000 more troops in Afghanistan than it disclosed, 14 March 2021, [url](#)

²²⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 55. CFR, U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan: What are Biden's options?, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

²²⁵ Clark, K., War in Afghanistan in 2020, just as much violence, but no one wants to talk about it, AAN, 16 August 2020, [url](#)

²²⁶ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2020–September 30, 17 November 2020, [url](#)

²²⁷ NATO, NATO-Afghanistan relations, June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²²⁸ NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, February 2021, n.d., [url](#), pp. 1-2

²²⁹ Tolonews, Afghan Govt welcomes NATO's decision on Afghanistan, 19 February 2021, [url](#); France24, NATO puts holds on Afghanistan decision, expands in Iraq, 18 February 2021, [url](#)

²³⁰ Germany, the Federal Government, Bundeswehr mission in Afghanistan to be extended, 24 February 2021, [url](#)

²³¹ Reuters, Germany extends military mission in Afghanistan into 2022, 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²³² UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General, A/71/826–S/2017/189, 3 March 2017, [url](#), p. 4

²³³ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 23

²³⁴ Daily Pakistan, Pakistan desires peace, stability in Afghanistan: Khawaja Asif, 2 September 2017, [url](#)

²³⁵ Dawn, Pakistan holds 'keys to war', says Afghan president, 31 January 2019, [url](#)



military operations disrupted some militant safe havens, certain groups, such as the Taliban and the Haqqani Network enjoyed freedom of movement in Pakistan.²³⁶ Following Imran Khan's inauguration as Prime Minister of Pakistan in August 2018, the two countries continued efforts to improve their relations.²³⁷ As part of a 'confidence-building measure' and showing that Pakistan opted for a constructive role in the Afghan peace talks, in October 2018, Islamabad released Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar who had been imprisoned since 2010. Mullah Baradar was appointed as a new leader for the Taliban's political office in Qatar, effectively making him the chief negotiator on behalf of the insurgent group for the peace talks with the US.²³⁸ However, in January 2019, President Ghani suggested that Pakistan was a safe haven for militants and their cross-border activities by saying that the 'keys to war are in Islamabad, Quetta, [and] Rawalpindi.'²³⁹

During the US-Taliban negotiations, Pakistan played a key role helping to bring the Taliban to the table.²⁴⁰ In January 2019, during a visit to Pakistan, US Senator Lindsay Graham acknowledged Pakistan's effort to help the Afghan peace process.²⁴¹ Pakistan's foreign minister Shah Mehmood was present when the peace agreement in Doha was signed.²⁴²

Signs of improvement in the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan reportedly came with the visit by Pakistan's military and intelligence chiefs to Kabul on 9 June 2020, which was described as an ice breaker for the relations between the two countries.²⁴³ The visit occurred ahead of intra-Afghan peace dialogue which was set to start in mid-June.²⁴⁴ At the beginning of July 2020, Abdullah Abdullah announced an official visit to Pakistan as part of the efforts to initiate the intra-Afghan talks.²⁴⁵ In November 2020, Pakistan Prime Minister, Imran Khan, travelled to Kabul and met with President Ghani to discuss 'bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Afghan peace process, and regional economic development and connectivity'.²⁴⁶

In 2017, there were several accounts of both Russia²⁴⁷ and Iran actively supporting the Taliban.²⁴⁸ Although Russia denied organising talks between Taliban representatives and an Afghan delegation led by Hamid Karzai, Moscow hosted meetings on the peace process in November 2018²⁴⁹ and February 2019 and according to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) it is 'highly unlikely such a high-profile event would be allowed to take place in Moscow without the Kremlin's blessing'.²⁵⁰ Interviewed by the Washington Post, Carter Malkasian, a former senior adviser to American military commanders in Afghanistan, observed that Russia had cultivated relations with certain Taliban elements, mainly in northern Afghanistan, since the beginning of 2015. Russia's interest in keeping

²³⁶ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 24

²³⁷ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General, A/73/624-S/2018/1092, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

²³⁸ RFE/RL, 'Hopeful Moment': How An 'Afghan-Led, Afghan-Owned' Peace Process Might Look, 29 January 2019, [url](#)

²³⁹ Dawn, Pakistan holds 'keys to war', says Afghan president, 31 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁰ Afzal M., Will the Afghan peace process be Pakistan's road to redemption?, Brookings Institution, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹ VOA, Taliban, US Open Afghan Peace Talks in Qatar, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁴² Afzal M., Will the Afghan peace process be Pakistan's road to redemption?, Brookings Institution, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁴³ Tribune, Afghanistan's Abdullah Abdullah to visit Pakistan soon, 5 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁴ AA, Pakistan's military, intelligence chiefs visit Kabul, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁵ Express Tribune (The), Afghanistan's Abdullah Abdullah to visit Pakistan soon, 5 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁶ Tolonews, Imran Khan arrives in Kabul to meet Afghan leaders, 19 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁷ Business Insider, Russia appears to now be helping out the Taliban, 28 January 2017 [url](#); Washington Post (The), Russia is sending weapons to Taliban, top U.S. general confirms, 24 April 2017 [url](#); Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, Landinfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), pp. 9-10. Some observers were more sceptical about Russia's direct involvement: see, Atlantic (The), Is Russia Really Arming the Taliban?, 25 August 2017, [url](#)

²⁴⁸ WSJ, Iran Backs Taliban With Cash and Arms, 11 June 2015 [url](#); VOA, Afghan Lawmakers to Investigate Growing Ties Between Taliban, Russia and Iran, 5 December 2016 [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Mounting Afghan Ire Over Iran's Support For Taliban, 31 July 2017, [url](#)

²⁴⁹ Al Jazeera, Taliban: Russia meeting 'not about direct talks' with Kabul, 9 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁵⁰ RFE/RL, 'Intra-Afghan' Talks Under Way In Moscow Amid Continuing Violence, 5 February 2019, [url](#)

relations with the Taliban was partly due to their concerns over the threat posed by Islamic State groups in the region, but also because of their desire to see the US withdraw from Afghanistan.²⁵¹

At the end of June 2020, the New York Times revealed that Russian military intelligence unit offered bounties to militias linked to the Taliban for killing US and coalition forces in Afghanistan. US intelligence officials told the New York Times that the White House had already been briefed about the intelligence and the US National Security Council had discussed this issue at an interagency meeting in late March 2020.²⁵² Following this revelation, both Russia and the Taliban denied the existence of the bounty program. US President Trump and his aides denied being ever briefed on the intelligence.²⁵³ In January 2021, Taliban delegation and Russian officials met in Moscow to discuss the 'intra-Afghan negotiations' and issues relating to the complete implementation of the US-Taliban peace deal signed in February 2020.²⁵⁴ In February 2021, Zamir Kabulov, Russian special envoy for Afghanistan met with Pakistani officials in Islamabad discussing efforts to reach a peace agreement.²⁵⁵

USDOD reported that Iran continued to pursue ties with the Afghan government, through trade, border security, and investment in shared railroad infrastructure; while at the same time continuing to provide 'calibrated' support to the Taliban.²⁵⁶ Tehran perceived the Taliban as an effective means to counter US influence on its border. Providing military equipment to them was seen as putting enough pressure on the United States without the risk of US military retaliation.²⁵⁷ Iran has tried to strengthen its relationship with some Taliban factions also through economic, diplomatic, and security activities. However, following the US-Taliban agreement in Doha, in Tehran there are fears that some of most extreme elements of the Taliban – mostly Sunni who are not well disposed towards predominantly Shia Iran – can take power in a new central government which might result from intra-Afghan talks.²⁵⁸

According to a UN report of March 2021, Hamdullah Mohib, Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, travelled to Tehran on 22 December 2020 to discuss the security situation in Afghanistan and the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country. On 10 December 2020, Afghan President and the President of Iran 'inaugurated the first three sections of the 225 km long railway that will link the Iranian city of Khaf in Khorasan Razavi Province with Herat Province in Afghanistan'. Simultaneously, the Afghanistan Railway Authority started the construction of the final section of railway from Rozanak to Robat Paryan, both located in Herat Province.²⁵⁹

In January 2021, a Taliban delegation met with Iranian officials in Tehran to discuss 'relations between both countries, the situation of the Afghan migrants in Iran, and the current political and security situation of Afghanistan and region'. Earlier in November 2019, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, director of the Taliban's diplomatic office in Qatar, met with Iranian Foreign Minister

²⁵¹ Washington Post (The), Russian bounties to Taliban-linked militants resulted in deaths of U.S. troops, according to intelligence assessments, 29 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁵² New York Times (The), Russia Secretly Offered Afghan Militants Bounties to Kill U.S. Troops, Intelligence Says, 26 June 2020, updated 1 July 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Trump Got Written Briefing in February on Possible Russian Bounties, Officials Say, 29 June 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Suspicions of Russian Bounties Were Bolstered by Data on Financial Transfers, 30 June 2020, updated 3 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁵³ Washington Post (The), Russian bounties to Taliban-linked militants resulted in deaths of U.S. troops, according to intelligence assessments, 29 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁴ Diplomat (The), Taliban visit Moscow, voice hope US will honor peace deal, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban delegation discusses peace talks with Russian officials, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

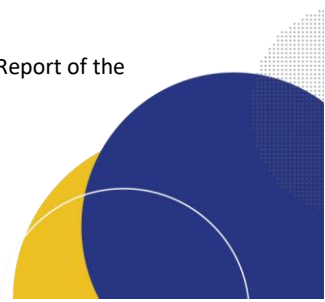
²⁵⁵ AP, Russia steps in, trying to aid stalled Afghan peace process, 20 February 2021, [url](#), p. 24

²⁵⁶ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 24

²⁵⁷ USIP, Iran and Afghanistan's Long, Complicated History, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁵⁸ Foreign Affairs, What Iran Wants in Afghanistan, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁹ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/811–S/2021/252, 12 March 2021, [url](#), p. 6



Mohammad Javad Zarif in Tehran.²⁶⁰ During the reporting period, relations between the Taliban and Iran reportedly improved.²⁶¹

In an article analysing the latest developments in Afghanistan, in the light of the US-Taliban agreement and its impact on the democratic achievements of the country, Dr Ellinor Zeino noted that 'Afghanistan remains politically, militarily and financially dependent on foreign allies and vulnerable to external conflicts of power and interests.'²⁶²

1.2 Actors in the conflict

1.2.1 Pro-government forces

According to the UNAMA annual report of 2020, pro-Government Forces (PGF) are composed of 'Afghan National Security Forces and other forces and groups that act in military or paramilitary counter-insurgency operations and are directly or indirectly under the control of the Government of Afghanistan' and include pro-Government armed groups and International military forces (IMF).²⁶³ For more information on the Afghan security institutions, including their mandate and structure, integrity, and the main reported cases of violations perpetrated by these security forces, see [EASO COI Report Afghanistan, State Structure and Security Forces, August 2020](#).

Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)

The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) or the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) are composed of the Afghan National Army (including Afghan Air Force and Afghan National Army - Territorial Forces), the Afghan Special Forces, National Directorate of Security (Afghanistan's State intelligence and security service, which has special forces that participate in military operations), Afghan Local Police, Afghan National Police, Afghan National Civil Order Force and Afghan Border Force.²⁶⁴

According to the USDOD report of December 2020, the authorised strength of the ANDSF remained 352 000 ANA and ANP personnel, which included the Afghan Air Force and Afghan Special Security Forces.²⁶⁵

On 30 January 2021, the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A), quoted in a SIGAR report, indicated that as of 29 October 2020, there were 305 021 ANDSF personnel including 186 899 Ministry of Defence (MoD) and 118 122 Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoI) personnel.²⁶⁶ During the same period, there has been a 6 % increase of 16 319 personnel within ANDSF including 15 000 within the MoI compared to the third quarter of 2020 (data from 25 July 2020) as a result of the transfer of some of Afghan Local Police (ALP) personnel to other parts of the MoI (following the dissolution of the ALP), increased recruiting and low attrition.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁰ Atlantic Council, Iran-Taliban growing ties: What's different this time?, 16 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁶¹ DW, Taliban buddies up to the Taliban, 3 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁶² Zeino E, Peace versus Democracy? Afghanistan between Government Crisis and a U.S. Peace Deal with the Taliban, Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁶³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 101 and 107

²⁶⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 101

²⁶⁵ USDOD, Enhancing security and stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 18

²⁶⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 59

²⁶⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 59

In August 2020, Kate Clark reported that ANDSF was mostly in 'responsive mode' during the reporting period, with less involvement of the US military forces in the conflict.²⁶⁸ As of November 2020, ANDSF was reportedly carrying out 96 % of its operations alone.²⁶⁹

According to the New York Times, 3 378 ANDSF personnel were killed in 2020,²⁷⁰ at least 239 were killed in January 2021²⁷¹ and at least 257 were killed February 2021.²⁷²

Voice of Jihad, the Taliban's website, claimed that in December 2020, 1 346 government personnel including ANDSF members joined their group,²⁷³ and 1293 ANDSF personnel joined the mentioned group in January 2021. The latter report contains full names, village, district, province, function and dates. The list also includes a few civil servants including judges.²⁷⁴

On 18 February 2021, Ariana news report that Afghan Commandos freed several prisoners including 16 ANA personnel, four Commandos, two ANP members, one NDS soldier from the Taliban prison in Qashlaq Kabuli area of Khan Abad district in Kunduz province during a rescue operation in which the prison has been reportedly destroyed. The source cited Afghan ministry of defence indicating that the freed 'prisoners were extensively tortured by the Taliban'.²⁷⁵

According to UNAMA, in 2020, ANDSF caused 1 906 civilian casualties including 674 killed and 1 232 injured, which represented a 13 % increase compared to 2019.²⁷⁶ Taliban reported that during the period from January to mid-December 2020, ANDSF caused the death of 872 people including 541 men, 133 women and 198 children.²⁷⁷

Afghan National Army (ANA)

The Afghan National Army (ANA) operates under the responsibility of the MoD and is part of the Armed Forces of Afghanistan²⁷⁸ and as of 29 October 2020, ANA counted 186 899 personnel including Afghan Air Force (AAF), while its authorised strength reduced from about 227 000 to 208 000.²⁷⁹

As of December 2020, around 29 000 ANA personnel were based in checkpoints across the country.²⁸⁰ During the last quarter of 2020, ANA removed 58 checkpoints but constructed 55 new ones. ANA created several checkpoints in and around Lashkar Gah (capital of Helmand province) in retaliation to the Taliban attack, which took place in October 2020.²⁸¹ In December 2020, ANA's 205th Corps abandoned around 200 checkpoints to the Taliban in Kandahar due to the attacks by the latter group.²⁸² Under the Afghan government's Checkpoint Reduction and Base Development

²⁶⁸ Clark, K., War in Afghanistan in 2020, just as much violence, but no one wants to talk about it, AAN, 16 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁹ Tolonews, ANDSF conducts 96 % of operations independently: Khalid, 17 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 31 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁷¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁷² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁷³ Voice of Jihad, Preaching and guidance: 1346 Kabul Administration workers joined Islamic Emirate in December 2020, 7 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁴ Voice Jihad, د افغانستان اسلامي امارت، د دعوت ارشاد، جلب و جذب کمیسیون، د کابل له اداري څخه د راپیل شویو افرادو هویت [informal translation: 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, preaching and guidance commission, identity of individuals leaving Kabul administration, 21 February 2021], [url](#)

²⁷⁵ Ariana News, Commandos free 24 from Taliban prisons, who had been "extensively" tortured, 18 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 63

²⁷⁷ Voice of Jihad, Annual civilian casualty report for 2020 by Commission for prevention of civilian casualties, 31 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 101

²⁷⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), pp. 59-60

²⁸⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 68

²⁸¹ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Report to the United States Congress, 1 October – 31 December 2020, 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 24

²⁸² SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), pp. 51, 67

Plan, 9 % of 2 000 vulnerable security checkpoints of ANA (which includes checkpoints that cannot be protected with artillery fire) would be shut down between 21 June 2020 and 20 March 2021.²⁸³

According to the USDOD report, attrition remained a major problem within the ANA, which affected ANA to reach full strength. The number of personnel dropped from the rolls (DFR) represent 66 % of attrition in the ANA. DFRs happen for different reasons, including ‘poor unit leadership, low pay or delays in pay, austere living conditions, denial of leave, and intimidation by insurgents’. Around a quarter of the monthly losses concern soldiers leaving the ANA at the end of the contract. ANA casualties during combat represent a small number of monthly losses and decreased importantly compared to earlier reporting periods.²⁸⁴

According to UNAMA, in 2020, ANA caused 1 021 civilian casualties including 313 killed and 708 wounded, which represented a 19 % increase compared to the year 2019.²⁸⁵

Afghan National Army Territorial Force (ANA TF)

In April 2018, President Ghani announced the establishment of the Afghan National Army Territorial Force (ANA TF).²⁸⁶ The goal was to create a local security force that is more effective, professional, sustainable and led by MoD. Contrary to the ALP, which is overseen by the MoI, the MoD will command and control the locally recruited, but nationally trained ANA TF personnel.²⁸⁷ ANA TF *tolays* (companies) operate ‘under six ANA corps and 111th Capital Division in 32 of 34 provinces’. Currently, there are no ANA TF presence in the 215th Corps, which is responsible for Helmand and Nimroz Provinces.²⁸⁸ As of December 2020, there were 126 operational ANA TF *tolays* across the country, with 81 additional *tolays* (including the 21 that are already operational) are transferrals from MoI to MoD to support the transfer of up to 10 851 ALP personnel to ANA TF.²⁸⁹ Each *tolay* recruits soldiers from a particular district but is led by officers from outside that district, already serving in the regular ANA or being in the ANA reserves.²⁹⁰ ANA TF *tolays* have a strength of up to 121 soldiers and are aimed at providing local security to counter the Taliban activities and to stop them from moving towards urban areas and important ‘lines of communication and transportation’.²⁹¹

Afghan Air Force (AAF)

The Afghan Air Force (AAF) is ‘the primary air enabler for ANDSF ground forces by providing air-to-ground fires and special operations forces and lift support to ground forces across Afghanistan’, with their headquarters in Kabul, they provide command and control of 18 detachments and three wings, including the Kabul Air Wing, the Kandahar Air Wing and the Shindand Air Wing.²⁹² According to the USDOD report of June 2020, ‘although human capital limitations remain a long-term concern, the AAF’s increased recruitment and high retention rates enable it to fill key positions. Growing the maintainer cadre to reduce reliance on contractor logistics support (CLS) remains the AAF’s top challenge.’²⁹³

²⁸³ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, Report to the United States Congress, 1 October – 31 December 2020, 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 24

²⁸⁴ USDOD, Enhancing security and stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 36, 37, 58

²⁸⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 64

²⁸⁶ Clark, K., The Afghan Territorial Force: Learning from the lessons of the past?, AAN, 15 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁷ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 39

²⁸⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 65

²⁸⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 65

²⁹⁰ Clark, K., The Afghan Territorial Force: Learning from the lessons of the past?, AAN, 15 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁹¹ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 65

²⁹² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 45

²⁹³ USDOD, Enhancing security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 61

As of June 2020, AAF remained one of the most capable forces within ANDSF and ‘continued to demonstrate operational and tactical proficiency’.²⁹⁴ According to SIGAR, the AAF had 136 available aircraft as of 1 January 2021.²⁹⁵

In 2020, UNAMA attributed 526 civilian casualties including 234 killed and 292 wounded to AAF, which represented a 126 % increase compared to 2019. On 21 October 2020, Afghan Air Force carried out an airstrike against a *madrassa* in Hazara Qarluq village in Takhar province that killed nine children, five boys and four girls, aged between five and nine years old and wounded 16 others, as well as the *mullah*.²⁹⁶

Afghan National Police (ANP)

The Afghan National Police (ANP) operates under the responsibility of the MoI and is the primary law enforcement agency in Afghanistan, and ‘in some instances, takes part in hostilities.’²⁹⁷

According to USDOD, as of 29 March 2020, ANP counted 99 000 personnel.²⁹⁸ On 30 January 2021, SIGAR indicated that, as of 29 October 2020, there were 118 122 ANP with an addition of 4 684 MoI civilian personnel.²⁹⁹ As of December 2020, 66 000 ANP personnel were based in³⁰⁰ 5 000 checkpoints, 1 054 of which have been identified for reduction or merging. During the last quarter of 2020, ANP closed 98 checkpoints.³⁰¹ According to Tolonews, ANP has reduced the number of its checkpoints to 113 bases and 3 700 checkpoints across the country to decrease its role in war and lower the number of its casualties.³⁰²

According to the Afghan Bios information, the Afghan National Police, referred here as Afghan Uniform Police (AUP) is designated to police stations and checkpoints across the country and is often the first-response service when an incident takes place. ANP is also in charge of conducting static and mobile checkpoints throughout the country to maintain security. In each of the 34 provincial capitals, there is a police headquarters, and there is ‘a police station in each of the country’s 364 districts.’³⁰³

Attrition remains a major problem within ANP. A large part of the attrition within ANP is due to ‘the combination of frequent and lengthy deployments to remote checkpoints with minimal provisions and equipment, difficult living conditions, and the near-constant prospect of attacks contribute to the high ANP attrition’.³⁰⁴ According to the New York Times’ war casualty reports, ANP personnel (which might include some ALP) were killed across the country in May,³⁰⁵ June,³⁰⁶ July,³⁰⁷ August,³⁰⁸

²⁹⁴ USDOD, Enhancing security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 2

²⁹⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 73

²⁹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 64, 68

²⁹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 101

²⁹⁸ USDOD, Enhancing security and stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 87

²⁹⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 59

³⁰⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 68

³⁰¹ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, Report to the United States Congress, 1 October – 31 December 2020, 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 24

³⁰² Tolonews, Taliban increased presence in areas left by ANDSF, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁰³ Afghanistan, Afghan Bios, Afghan biographies, Afghan National Police (ANP), 1 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁴ USDOD, Enhancing security and stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 87-88

³⁰⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 30 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

September,³⁰⁹ October,³¹⁰ November,³¹¹ and December 2020,³¹² and also in January³¹³ and February 2021.³¹⁴

According to UNAMA, in 2020, ANP caused 75 civilian casualties including 31 killed and 44 wounded, which represented a 17 % decrease compared to 2019.³¹⁵

On 5 September, an ANP personnel shot and killed a civilian man who refused to pay money to pass the checkpoint at a security checkpoint in Qalat district of Zabul province.³¹⁶

Afghan Local Police (ALP)

In August 2010, the ALP was created as a security initiative led by the MoI and funded by the US Government.³¹⁷ Officially, the ALP reports to the MoI at national level but, in practice, since June 2015, it has been subordinated to the AUP (which belongs to the ANP),³¹⁸ however it is not counted as part of the ANSF's authorised strength.³¹⁹ Since 2001, the Afghan state and international military forces have tried to develop a 'local force model' in order to fill security gaps and defend the territory from AGEs. According to an analysis by AAN, although this model has worked in some cases, in others has not proved to be successful mainly due to the fact that 'local forces have been co-opted by ethnic, factional or criminal interests and abused the local population'. These factors have contributed to decision to dissolve the ALP, which has been the main local force for the last ten years.³²⁰ In September 2020, ALP was dissolved, and its funding was stopped by the decision of the United States Congress. The US was the only international funder for ALP.³²¹

According to Kate Clark, co-Director, and senior analyst at AAN, in October 2020, there were 18 000 ALP men present in 31 provinces of Afghanistan. The plan was to disarm and retire one third, to transfer one third to ANP and the remaining one third to ANA Territorial Forces.³²² While Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported on 30 January 2021 that 15 000 ALP personnel were transferred to ANP.³²³

Kate Clark cited a journalist stating example of ALP in Kunduz:

'The ALP has a bad reputation. It has caused serious problems for locals and has no place among the people. It has been collecting 'taxes' and other revenues and has been forcing locals to provide food. In fact, many ALP commanders are criminals. They're involved in robbery, looting private houses, kidnapping, drug trafficking and even the killing of civilians... Most of the ALP commanders have links with powerbrokers and warlords and therefore, the judicial system faces serious challenges in prosecuting them'.³²⁴

³⁰⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³¹¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 26 November 2020, [url](#)

³¹² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 31 December 2020, [url](#)

³¹³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 64

³¹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 70

Clark, K., Civilian casualties worsen as intra-Afghan talks began, says UNAMA's 2020 report on the protection of civilians, AAN, 23 February 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁷ SIGAR, Afghan Local Police: A Critical Rural Security Initiative Lacks Adequate Logistics Support, Oversight, and Direction, 16 October 2015, [url](#)

³¹⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 April 2016, [url](#), p. 107

³¹⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017, [url](#), p. 104

³²⁰ Clark K., et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN and GPPI, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 2, 9, 75

³²¹ Clark, K., Disbanding the ALP: A dangerous final chapter for a force with a chequered history, AAN, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

³²² Clark, K., Disbanding the ALP: A dangerous final chapter for a force with a chequered history, AAN, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

³²³ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 59

³²⁴ Clark, K., Disbanding the ALP: A dangerous final chapter for a force with a chequered history, AAN, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

In February 2021, UNAMA indicated that, between 1 January 2019 and 31 March 2020, it documented, with Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 17 cases of detention of individuals being deprived from liberty for security- or terrorism-related offences by the ALP. In eight cases, which represent 47 %, detainees indicated ‘credible and reliable reports of having been subjected to torture and ill-treatment, reporting beating as the main technique’. These cases reportedly happened in Badakhshan, Balkh, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Paktika and Paktya.³²⁵

According to UNAMA, in 2020, ALP caused 24 civilian casualties including seven killed and 17 wounded, which represented a 33 % decrease compared to 2019.³²⁶

USDOS Trafficking in persons report of June 2020, indicated that local police ‘openly exploited boys in *bacha bazi* (sexual exploitation of boys) on a large scale without fear of reprisal’, notably in Kandahar province.³²⁷ Between 1 January and 31 December 2020, UNAMA verified 10 cases of rape and sexual exploitation against nine boys and five girls including three cases by the Afghan National Police, two by the Taliban, one by Afghan Local Police, one by Afghan National Army, one by Afghan National Army-Territorial Force, one by civilians, and one by a pro-government armed group.³²⁸

On 21 January 2021, RFE/RL reported that local police in Farah province forced drug addicted people to work without pay in military compounds. While these claims were rejected by the ALP as baseless, the source cited provincial offices of the Afghanistan’s Labour and social Affairs Ministry confirming the allegations.³²⁹

Pro-government militias

UNAMA defines pro-government armed groups as follows:

‘[O]rganized non-state armed actors engaged in conflict against armed opposition groups. These groups are distinct from Government Forces and lack legal basis under the laws of Afghanistan. They include the National Uprising Movements [*De Melli Patsun Ghorzang*,³³⁰ also referred to as public uprising forces,³³¹], a community-based defence initiative, the Khost Protection Force, and Paktika-based forces known locally in the southeastern region of Afghanistan as “Shaheen Forces”. According to sources, these forces, also known as “904 Unit”, operate out of “Shaheen Camp” in Urgun district, Paktika province and may have a relationship with National Directorate of Security Special Forces.’³³²

Arbaki existed in Afghanistan as a specific tribal security structure for hundreds of years.³³³ The ‘term [*arbaki*] was used for the ALP in many parts of the country’³³⁴ before it was dissolved in September 2020³³⁵ and 15 000 of its personnel were transferred to MoI.³³⁶

In 2015, the government developed a National Uprising Support Strategy to establish pro-government armed groups in areas in Afghanistan where ANDSF presence was limited. The NDS

³²⁵ UNAMA, Preventing torture and upholding the rights of detainees in Afghanistan: a factor for peace, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 16-17

³²⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 64

³²⁷ USDOS, Trafficking in Persons Report - Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 65

³²⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 35

³²⁹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan police accused of using drug addicts as free labor, 21 January 2021, [url](#)

³³⁰ Clark, K., Fazl Rahman Muzhary, uprising, ALP and Taleban in Andar: the arc of government failure, AAN, 22 May 2018, [url](#)

³³¹ Tolonews, 30 members of public forces killed in Baghlan, 29 June 2019, [url](#)

³³² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 101-102

³³³ Seraj, A., The Arbaki can secure Afghanistan better than the US, Al Jazeera, 5 November 2014, [url](#).

³³⁴ Habib, E., The Morphing of the Andar Uprising: transition to Afghan Local Police, AAN, 2 April 2013, [url](#)

³³⁵ Clark, K., Disbanding the ALP: A dangerous final chapter for force with a chequered history, AAN, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

³³⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 59

reportedly hired village or tribal elders to ‘propose “national uprising” group members, who NDS subsequently vets’. The strength of these armed groups varied from 22 to 500 fighters, commanded by NDS or ANP.³³⁷ The Afghan government, NDS and CIA are known to arm strongmen to fight the Taliban and other militants, but some militia leaders use their new power to fight local turf wars. According to the LA Times, various militias and personal armed groups also battle amongst themselves over political influence, ‘power, drug deals and other internal issues.’³³⁸

Reuters indicated that in the past years, more than 30 000 villagers were paid and armed by the government with the support of international forces to fight as militia groups against the Taliban across the country. Although the government disbanded militia groups and stopped paying them, many maintained their fight against the Taliban and ISKP. ‘The Taliban consider pro-government militia forces a big threat because they have strong intelligence networks, often both sides know each other’s families.’³³⁹

AAN’s co-Director Kate Clark described the Khost Protection Force as a ‘campaign force’ that was established after 2001 under international (mainly CIA/US special forces) control. Similar militias include the Kandahar Strike Force and Paktika’s Afghan Security Guards. There are longstanding allegations against the Khost Protection Force of ‘extrajudicial killings, torture, beating and unlawful detentions’.³⁴⁰ UNAMA added that the Khost Protection Force functions outside of the regular military command and control structures.³⁴¹ In April 2020, Kate Clark noted:

‘Despite the many pitfalls associated with local defence forces [...] when they work, they work extremely well, producing determined fighters with local knowledge who protect the civilians in their areas and often stand their ground more than regular troops because they have nowhere else to retreat to.’³⁴²

According to UNAMA, in 2020, pro-government armed groups caused 107 civilian casualties including 50 killed and 57 wounded in 2020, which represented a 42 % decrease compared to 2019.³⁴³ According to AAN report, Khost Protection Forces and Shaheen Forces continued [in 2020] killing and injuring civilians including the shooting of a civilian during a search operation in Matun District of Khost province on 14 October 2020.³⁴⁴

International Military Forces

UNAMA explains the scope of the term ‘International Military Forces’ as follows:

International military forces are composed of all foreign troops operating partly within the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission and other US Forces-Afghanistan (which also includes Operation Freedom’s Sentinel). The term also includes Special Operations Forces and other foreign intelligence and security forces.³⁴⁵

From 2011, there was a gradual transition of security responsibilities from international forces to ANSF.³⁴⁶ On 31 December 2014, ISAF’s mandate expired and on 1 January 2015, this led to the transition from NATO’s ISAF combat mission to a new non-combat mission, Resolute Support, with a

³³⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2015, February 2016, [url](#), pp. 65-66

³³⁸ Los Angeles Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, both legal and illegal, 31 October 2016, [url](#)

³³⁹ Reuters, Taliban kill 14 pro-government militia in Afghanistan: Officials, 28 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁰ Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

³⁴¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 57

³⁴² Clark, K., The Afghan Territorial Force: Learning from the lessons of the past?, AAN, 15 January 2019, [url](#); VOA, 26 pro-government Afghans killed in fighting, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁴³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 65

³⁴⁴ Clark, K., Civilian casualties worsen as intra-Afghan talks began, says UNAMA’s 2020 report on the protection of civilians, AAN, 23 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2015, February 2016, [url](#), p. 80

³⁴⁶ NATO, Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead, updated 7 January 2015, [url](#)

focus on training, advising and assisting ANSF.³⁴⁷ According to NATO, in June 2020, the total Resolute Support Mission strength was 15 937.³⁴⁸ As of February 2021, the total Resolute Support Mission strength reduced to 9 592 and in total, 36 countries contributed troops to RS with the US, Germany and the UK as the largest contributors.³⁴⁹ According to the New York times, the NATO and allied troops present in the country rely on logistical and force protection of the US troops in Afghanistan.³⁵⁰

In March 2020, Stars and Stripes, which ‘provides independent news and information to the U.S. military community’, reported that the US troops have started to move out from their bases in Helmand (Bost Airfield), Laghman (Gamberi base) and a base in Herat province.³⁵¹ On 1 July 2020, USDOD indicated that nearly 13 000 US military personnel were serving in Afghanistan³⁵², with around 8 000 of them assigned to the NATO RS mission.³⁵³ According to a SIGAR report of March 2021, in November 2020, the US troops in Afghanistan reduced to 4 000 – 5 000, and in January 2021 to 2 500 personnel.³⁵⁴ In March 2021, the New York Times cited the US, EU and Afghan officials indicating that there were indeed 3 500 US troops in Afghanistan (1 000 more).³⁵⁵ According to the US – Taliban deal, the US troops withdrawal from Afghanistan has been planned for 1 May 2021.³⁵⁶

According to UNAMA, in 2020, International Military Forces caused 120 civilian casualties including 89 killed and 31 wounded, which represented a 85 % decrease compared to 2019.³⁵⁷

1.2.2 Anti-government elements

UNAMA in February 2021 indicated that:

‘[Anti-Government Elements] include members of the ‘Taliban’ as well as other non-State organized armed groups taking a direct part in hostilities against Pro-Government Forces including the Haqqani Network (which operates under Taliban leadership and largely follows Taliban policies and instructions), Al Qaeda, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkar[-e] Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed, groups identifying themselves as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan Province/‘Daesh’ and other militia and armed groups pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives including armed criminal groups directly engaged in hostile acts on behalf of other Anti-Government Elements.’³⁵⁸

Information on the main Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) in Afghanistan, primarily the Taliban and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), including their *modus operandi*, structure, activities and targeted attacks can be found in [EASO COI Report Afghanistan, Anti-Government Elements \(AGEs\), August 2020](#).

³⁴⁷ NATO, Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, updated 27 February 2015, [url](#); UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan (Reporting Period: 1 September 2010 – 31 December 2014), S/2015/336, 15 May 2015, [url](#), p. 2.; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 83-84

³⁴⁸ NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, 18 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁴⁹ NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, February 2021, n.d., [url](#), pp. 1 and 2

³⁵⁰ New York Times (The), US has 1 000 more troops in Afghanistan than it disclosed, 14 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵¹ Stars and Stripes, US troops have left bases in Helmand, Laghman provinces, officials say, 13 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁵² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, June 2020, [url](#), p. 10

³⁵³ NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, 18 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁵⁴ SIGAR, 2021 HIGH-Risk list, [url](#), March 2021, p. 14

³⁵⁵ New York Times (The), US has 1 000 more troops in Afghanistan than it disclosed, 14 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁶ Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America, 29 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 1-2; USIP, Afghanistan Study Group Final Report, February 2021, 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 20

³⁵⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 65

³⁵⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 102

Taliban

The Taliban is an AGE that has been active in Afghanistan for decades. The Taliban leadership ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 when it was removed from power by US/international forces; it has continued to conduct an insurgency following its removal.³⁵⁹ Since 2001, the group has preserved some key principles including a strict interpretation of sharia law in areas under its control.³⁶⁰

The Taliban is structured and position itself as the shadow government of Afghanistan³⁶¹ and its commissions and governing bodies replicate the administrative offices and duties of a typical government.³⁶² The Taliban has become an 'organized political movement operating a parallel administration in large swaths of Afghanistan'³⁶³ and has evolved to become a 'local governance actor' in the country by gaining and holding territory and thereby undertaking 'some responsibility for the well-being of local communities'.³⁶⁴ Regarding militant operations, it is a networked insurgency, with central leadership at the top and decentralised local commanders who can recruit and mobilise resources at the district level.³⁶⁵

In January 2021, the New York Times reported on the estimates made by the Afghan and the US [sources] indicating that the Taliban had an around 50 000 to 60 000 active fighters and tens of thousands of part-time armed men and facilitators in Afghanistan.³⁶⁶ According to the Council on Foreign Relation (CFR) report of 15 March 2021, there were between 55 000 and 85 000 full time active Taliban fighters in Afghanistan.³⁶⁷

ToloneWS cited the Afghan Ministry of Defence stating that during the period between 21 March 2020 and 21 March 2021 (which corresponds to Afghan year 1399), 18 000 Taliban were killed during clashes.³⁶⁸

The Taliban continued to recruit sufficient young men to keep fighting and the families kept responding to the Taliban's demand as a result of the flourishing benefits that the group provides. For instance, under the Taliban military commission, the 'Guidance and Invite' committee operated in Alingar district of Laghman province to recruit fighters from amongst the mosques and Quranic schools [*madrassas*³⁶⁹], and mostly, the current fighters work to recruit friends and relatives.³⁷⁰

In Dasht-e Archi district of Kunduz province, the Taliban recruit from within the local population and are capable of recruiting from the *madrassas*³⁷¹ and in Ali district of Helmand province, they

³⁵⁹ BBC News, Who are the Taliban?, 27 February 2020, [url](#); see also Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of Anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, AREU, January 2012, [url](#)

³⁶⁰ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Constitution offers glimpse into militant group's vision for Afghanistan, 27 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁶¹ New York Times (The), How the Taliban Outlasted a Superpower: Tenacity and Carnage, updated 15 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁶² UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 12

³⁶³ Jackson, A. and Amiri, R., Insurgent Bureaucracy: How the Taliban Makes Policy, USIP, Peaceworks No. 153, November 2019, [url](#), p. 6

³⁶⁴ Smith, S. S., Service Delivery in Taliban-Influenced Areas of Afghanistan, USIP, Special Reports No. 465, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 3

³⁶⁵ New York Times (The), How the Taliban Outlasted a Superpower: Tenacity and Carnage, updated 15 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁶ New York Times (The), How the Taliban Outlasted a Superpower: Tenacity and Carnage, updated 15 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁷ CFR, The Taliban in Afghanistan, 15 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁸ ToloneWS, 1399 a tough year for Afghan forces: Miakhil, 20 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁹ Intercept (The), The CIA's Afghan death squads, A U.S.-backed militia that kills children may be America's exit strategy from its longest war, 18 December 2020, [url](#); AAN, Living with the Taliban (3): Local experiences in Dasht-e Archi district, Kunduz province, 25 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁰ New York Times (The), How the Taliban outlasted a superpower: tenacity and carnage, updated 15 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁷¹ Sediqi, B., Living with the Taleban (3): Local experiences in Dasht-e Archi district, Kunduz province, AAN, 25 January 2021, [url](#)

promote recruitments sometimes via the mosques or during ceremonies such as marriages or funerals.³⁷²

In 2020, the Taliban launched their spring offensive,³⁷³ and according to a survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from mid-November 2020 until early February 2021,³⁷⁴ the Taliban controlled 52 % of the territory in Afghanistan including 27 districts³⁷⁵ and the centres³⁷⁶ of 39 districts.³⁷⁷

In December 2020, the Taliban took control of nearly 200 checkpoints (including weapons and ammunition) left by ANA's 205th Corps in Kandahar province.³⁷⁸

According to a New York Times report of 16 February 2021, the Taliban advanced towards key cities in Afghanistan including Kunduz, where Taliban captured 'outposts and military bases, using small armed drones', Pul-e Khumri [Baghlan province], where the group captured important highways to control the city, threatening the main vital route to Kabul. The Taliban fighters have carried out continued attacks on the districts surrounding the city of Kandahar (including Panjwai district) and moved closer to take the provincial capital.³⁷⁹

On 16 February 2021, Tamim Hamid, investigative reporter at Tolonews, stated that the Taliban movements were reported in Kunduz, Baghlan, Uruzgan, Kandahar and Helmand provinces, on the highways that link Kabul to other province and as well as in the outskirts of provincial capitals.³⁸⁰ On 17 February 2021, Tolonews quoted Members of the Afghan Parliament reporting that 'Dand, Arghandab, Zhari and Panjwai districts in Kandahar have witnessed growing threats [from the Taliban] over the past few months. The source also cited Rohullah Ahmadzai, Afghan Defence Ministry spokesman, stating that Taliban were pushed out in large parts of Maiwand, Arghandab, and Zhari districts of Kandahar province.³⁸¹

Following the US-Taliban agreement (signed in February 2020), which stipulated the withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan, the Taliban have increasingly taken control of the highways in the country,³⁸² and maintained pressure on key transportation routes and cities.³⁸³ The Taliban took control of areas where the ANDSF military left their bases and checkpoints. They also created checkpoints on Kunduz-Takhar highway, and the government pulled out checkpoints from Pul-e Khumri to Mazar-e Sharif highway.³⁸⁴

The Taliban continued a severe winter fight against ANDSF and have been viewed to be preparing for a major 2021 spring offensive.³⁸⁵ The group appointed designated governors for 11 provinces

³⁷² AAN, Living with the Taleban (2): Local experiences in Nad Ali district, Helmand province, 18 January 2021, [url](#);

³⁷³ Clark, K., War in Afghanistan in 2020, just as much violence, but no one wants to talk about it, AAN, 16 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁴ For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephone interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country, see Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁵ Farah: Khaki-e-Safid, QalaKah, Bakwa; Ghor: Murghab; Kunduz: Gulbad and GulTepa; Kandahar: Raig; Paktika: Naka; Herat: Zerkoh, Pushtkoh and KohZwoar; Badakhshan: Yamgan; Nuristan: Mandol; Wardak: Daimerdad; Zabul: Daichopan, Nawbahar and Khak Afghan; Helmand: Nawzad, Musa Kala, Khansheen, Baghran and Dishu; Ghazni: Gero, Ajristan and Nawa; Jawzjan: Zarab; Badghis: Ghormach

³⁷⁶ Farah: Gulistan; Uruzgan: Dihrawod; Kandahar: Aqtash in Kunduz, Maroof and Ghorak; Paktika: Kohistanat in Sar-i-Pul, Giyan; Ghazni: Zankhan, Rashidan and Waeez; Khost: Qalandar.

³⁷⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Gov, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 67

³⁷⁹ New York Times (The), The Taliban close in on Afghan cities, pushing the country to the brink, 16 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁰ Tolonews, Warring sides prepare for spring offensive despite peace efforts, 16 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁸¹ Tolonews, Kandahar may fall to Taliban because of poor leadership: MPs, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁸² New York Times (The), on Afghan highways, even the police fear Taliban's toll collectors, 12 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁸³ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/811-S/2021/252, 12 March 2021, [url](#), p. 5

³⁸⁴ Tolonews, Taliban increase presence in areas left by ANDSF, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁵ VOA, Afghan peace talks under threat as major Taliban spring offensive takes shape, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

including Khost, Nangarhar, Paktya, Paktika, Kabul, Samangan, Kunduz, Takhar, Bamiyan, Laghman and Parwan. The group also appointed deputy governors and heads of military commissions.³⁸⁶

In March 2021, Anthony Blinken, US Secretary of State, reportedly warned in a letter addressed to Ashraf Ghani, Afghan President, on the Taliban's ability to make 'rapid territorial gains' throughout Afghanistan in a 'spring offensive'.³⁸⁷ According to Tolonews, the Taliban indicated that the group did not start their spring offensive in 2020 following the February 2020 agreement. During the period between 21 March 2020 and 21 March 2021 (which corresponds to Afghan year 1399), ANDSF reportedly took back control of eight districts from the Taliban.³⁸⁸

According to UNAMA, in 2020, the Taliban caused 3 960 civilian casualties including 1 470 death and 2 490 wounded, which represented a 13 % increase in civilians killed, and a 31 % decrease in civilians wounded compared to 2019. The group was responsible for 43 % increase in civilian casualties killed by 'non-suicide IEDs, especially through the use of victim-activated pressure-plate IEDs and vehicle-borne non-suicide IEDs'.³⁸⁹

Haqqani network

Haqqani network (HQN) is an UN-designated terrorist organisation.³⁹⁰ It is described as a powerful faction of the Taliban.³⁹¹ According to USDOD, the Haqqani Network continued to be integral part of Taliban's attacks against the Afghan Government in Kabul and eastern Afghanistan, for instance the Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) attack on a convoy in Kabul on 5 September 2019 that killed a US service member. Since Sirajuddin Haqqani became the Deputy Leader of the Taliban in 2015, the Haqqani Network has probably 'increased the Haqqani Network's influence within the Taliban organization, as well as in areas outside of HQN's normal operating region: Paktika, Paktya, and Khost Provinces in eastern region'.³⁹²

Haqqani reportedly collaborates and keeps close contact with Al Qaeda³⁹³ despite the US-deal.³⁹⁴ The UN stated in May 2020 that there were indications that senior figures in Haqqani network and Al Qaeda were planning to create a joint unit of 2 000 fighters split into two zones of operation, one in Loya Paktya (Khost, Logar, Paktya, Paktika) and the other in Kunar and Nuristan.³⁹⁵ In Loya Paktya, Sirajuddin and his forces control these regions by military strength and the support of the local populations, and Haqqani Network's presence, notably, in Khost province allows the group an easy border-cross of arms and people between Afghanistan and Pakistan.³⁹⁶

As of September 2020, Haqqani militants counted around 10 000 militants in Afghanistan, which represented approximately 20 % of the Taliban's fighting forces.³⁹⁷ Haqqani network is considered as the 'lethal arm of the Taliban'³⁹⁸ and the group 'has assumed an increasingly influential role in the

³⁸⁶ Tolonews, Taliban reshuffles key posts as new fighting season nears, 6 March 2021, [url](#).

³⁸⁷ BBC News, Afghanistan conflict : US makes a new push for UN-led peace process, 8 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁸ Tolonews, 1399 a tough year for Afghan forces: Miakhil, 20 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 17

³⁹⁰ UN Security Council, United Nations Security Council Consolidated List, 18 July 2020, [url](#), p. 152. For a narrative description of the group, see United Nations (UN) Security Council, Haqqani Network, n.d., [url](#)

³⁹¹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Spy Agency Says 'IS-Haqqani' Cell Busted in Kabul, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁹² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 25

³⁹³ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3

³⁹⁴ RFE/RL/Gandhara, UN Monitors: Taliban Maintains 'Close' Ties With Al-Qaeda Despite U.S. Peace Deal, 2 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁵ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 38

³⁹⁶ ASP, The Haqqani Network, the shadow group supporting the Taliban's operations, September 2020, n.d., [url](#), p. 2

³⁹⁷ ASP, The Haqqani Network, the shadow group supporting the Taliban's operations, September 2020, n.d., [url](#), p. 6

³⁹⁸ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Deadly Kabul attacks expose possible division within the Taliban, 7 November 2020, [url](#)

Taliban's military operations'.³⁹⁹ Haqqani network recruited many of its militants from northern Pakistan and south-eastern Afghanistan, and attracted foreign fighters as well from Uzbekistan, Chechnya and Turkey.⁴⁰⁰

In February 2021, UNAMA indicated Haqqani Network operated under the Taliban leadership and mostly followed Taliban policies and directions.⁴⁰¹ During the same period, Tolonews cited Rahmatullah Nabil, former head of NDS, who stated that members of Haqqani Network increased their presence in Afghanistan including its expansion into Badakhshan and Herat provinces.⁴⁰²

Haqqani and ISKP were reportedly working together, including for the launching of a rocket attack on the Afghanistan Presidential inauguration and an assault on a Sikh temple in Kabul in March 2020 that killed 25 people.⁴⁰³

In January 2020, SIGAR reported that RS attributed 91 % of the civilian casualties to AGEs including 4 % to Haqqani Network during the last quarter of 2019 (October – December 2019).⁴⁰⁴ However, it is difficult to distinguish Haqqani attacks from Taliban attacks. According to UNAMA, in the past, Haqqani 'undertook attacks while maintaining a degree of operational independence.' There are assumptions that the group was responsible for complex attacks on 'Government and international targets' in parts of Kabul with large density of population.⁴⁰⁵ For example, on 14 May 2020, five people were killed when a truck bomb exploded outside a military court in Gardez, Paktya, injuring dozens. A spokesman for the Afghan Interior Ministry blamed Haqqani, which maintains ties to the Taliban, but the Taliban denied being involved.⁴⁰⁶

During the third quarter of 2020 (July – September), SIGAR reported that RS attributed 82 % of civilian casualties to AGEs including 2 % to Haqqani Network.⁴⁰⁷ The 24 October 2020 suicide attack at the entrance of a private school in Dasht-e Barchi area in Kabul, which killed at least 24 people and injured more than 50, was reportedly carried out by Haqqani Network.⁴⁰⁸ In SIGAR's last quarterly report of 2020 (October – December), no casualty was attributed to Haqqani Network.⁴⁰⁹

Al Qaeda and affiliated groups

Al Qaeda is a transnational extremist Salafist jihadist organisation and UN-designated terrorist group, as are its affiliate branches.⁴¹⁰

Sources indicate that Al Qaeda maintains relations with the Taliban⁴¹¹ and a limited presence in Afghanistan, carrying out its activities mostly under the umbrella of other AGEs, particularly the Taliban.⁴¹² According to the UN Security Council, Al Qaeda and other foreign terrorists that are

³⁹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 102

⁴⁰⁰ ASP, The Haqqani Network, the shadow group supporting the Taliban's operations, September 2020, n.d., [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁰¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 102

⁴⁰² Tolonews, Haqqani Network increases presence in Afghanistan: Nabil, 4 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Spy Agency Says 'IS-Haqqani' Cell Busted in Kabul, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 70

⁴⁰⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 102

⁴⁰⁶ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Truck Bomb Kills At Least Five In Eastern Afghanistan, 14 May 2020, [url](#); Diplomat (The), The Taliban and al-Qaeda: Enduring Partnership or Liability?, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#), p. 76

⁴⁰⁸ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Deadly Kabul attacks expose possible division within the Taliban, 7 November 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 54

⁴¹⁰ UN Security Council, United Nations Security Council Consolidated List, 18 July 2020, [url](#), p. 142

⁴¹¹ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 32 and 41

⁴¹² UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2019, February 2020, [url](#), p. 85

‘aligned with it, under the protection and influence of the Taliban, pose a long-term global threat’.⁴¹³ However, in wake of the US agreement, in June 2020, the Taliban went so far as to deny that Al Qaeda even existed in Afghanistan.⁴¹⁴ Michael Semple, former UN advisor quoted by Foreign Policy magazine, stated that the Taliban has intensified its connections to Al Qaeda since signing the Doha agreement in February 2020.⁴¹⁵ Since the emergence of the “Islamic State” (IS) group, Al Qaeda has sought to discredit it by promoting the Taliban’s *Emir* as the ‘more theologically correct’ leader for Afghan Muslims.⁴¹⁶

According to the UN Security Council reports issued in May 2020⁴¹⁷ and February 2021⁴¹⁸, Al Qaeda was ‘covertly active’ in Badakhshan, Ghazni, Helmand, Khost, Kunar, Kunduz, Logar, Nangarhar, Nimruz (only mentioned in the May 2020 report), Nuristan, Paktya and Zabul with an estimated number of 400 to 600 members reported in May 2020 and between 200 to 500 in February 2021.⁴¹⁹ During the same period,, UNAMA reported that Al Qaeda maintained a limited presence with 400 to 600 fighters present primarily in Khost, Kunar, Nuristan, Paktya and Zabul provinces.⁴²⁰

In what the UN calls an ‘unusual move’, Al Qaeda released on its media site Thabat, a summary of attacks it claimed to have carried out in March 2020, which shows ‘hundreds of alleged attacks carried out in Afghanistan’ leading to ANDSF casualties. The UN stated that the statistics appeared to be exaggerated.⁴²¹ On 11 May 2020, Tolonews quoted security officials claiming that Al Qaeda and Jaish-Mohammad group (based in Pakistan) fight alongside the Taliban against ANDSF in eastern provinces of Afghanistan including Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan Provinces. The Taliban reportedly denied the claim.⁴²² Tolonews quoted Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum stating that members of Al-Qaeda including Nasruddin (grandson of Osama Bin Laden) and Saifuddin Haqqani (the son of Sirajuddin Haqqani) were present in the Ghormach and Bala Murghab districts [Badghis province] in February 2021.⁴²³

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan / Jundullah

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which is also referred as Jundallah⁴²⁴, has ‘lost its independent status’ and is now part of the Taliban forces carrying their activities in Faryab and Zabul

⁴¹³ UN Security Council, Twenty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/53, 20 January 2020, [url](#), para. 8

⁴¹⁴ Joscelyn, T., Taliban falsely claims Al Qaeda doesn’t exist in Afghanistan, LWJ, 15 June 2020, [url](#); Roggio, B., Analysis: Taliban is caught in a lie by denying Al Qaeda’s presence in Afghanistan, LWJ, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴¹⁵ FP, Factional Struggles Emerge in Virus-Afflicted Taliban Top Ranks, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴¹⁶ Diplomat (The), The Taliban and al-Qaeda: Enduring Partnership or Liability?, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴¹⁷ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 33-34

⁴¹⁸ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), para. 64

⁴¹⁹ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 33-34; UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), para. 64

⁴²⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 103

⁴²¹ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 43

⁴²² Tolonews, Al Qaeda, Jaish-Mohammad align with Taliban in East: officials, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴²³ Tolonews, Dostum, Al-Qaeda footprint seen in North of Afghanistan, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴²⁴ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 84, footnote 40

Provinces, according to the UN Security Council reported in early 2020 and the group was led by Mohammad Yuldash⁴²⁵ (also named as Abdulaziz Yuldash), who was killed in Ghormach district (Badghis province), in November 2020.⁴²⁶ The group suffered material losses, its members engaged in criminal activities such as smuggling drugs via the northern route.⁴²⁷

According to the UN Security Council report of February 2021, the number of IMU members were estimated to be up to 700 people in Afghanistan including family members and around 70 Central Asians who left ISKP and joined IMU.⁴²⁸

Islamic State Khorasan Province

The Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) is a UN-designated terrorist organisation in Afghanistan⁴²⁹ with operational ties with local groups.⁴³⁰ It is a Salafi-Jihadist organisation that believes it is reviving a pure form of Islam maintaining that this can only be achieved by an armed jihad that will replace existing governments with an Islamic state, ideally a transnational Islamic caliphate, and which permits mass-casualty attacks against non-combatants as legitimate in its aims.⁴³¹

In 2020, several ISKP senior figures, including its leader Aslam Farooqi, were captured by Afghan forces.⁴³² Previously, it was reported that senior leaders have gone further into the mountains, gone into hiding, fled to Kunar, or crossed into Pakistan.⁴³³ As of May 2020 reporting, ISKP in Kunar is directed by the ISKP-Deputy leader, Sheikh Matiullah Kamahwal, though it is unclear who is now the leader of ISKP nationally following Farooqi's capture.⁴³⁴

ISKP used to have a presence spread over seven districts in Nangarhar. However, the May 2020 UN Security Council report states that 'interlocutors of the Monitoring Team maintained that ISIL-K has no permanent organized presence in the north of Afghanistan, although the Team has received reports of small groups of foreign fighters believed to be members of ISIL-K operating in Taliban-controlled areas of the north.'⁴³⁵

⁴²⁵ UN Security Council, Twenty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/53, 20 January 2020, [url](#), para. 61

⁴²⁶ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), para. 66

⁴²⁷ UN Security Council, Twenty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/53, 20 January 2020, [url](#), para. 61

⁴²⁸ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), para. 66

⁴²⁹ UN Security Council, Twenty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/53, 20 January 2020, [url](#), para. 8; UN Security Council, United Nations Security Council Consolidated List, 18 July 2020, [url](#), p. 154

⁴³⁰ Jadoon, A. and Mines, A., Taking aim: Islamic State Khorasan's leadership losses, CTC Sentinel, September 2019, [url](#), p. 14

⁴³¹ Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, Peaceworks No. 162, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁴³² Tolonews, "Key" Daesh leaders arrested in Kabul: NDS, 11 May 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Forces Capture Key Figures from Islamic State's South Asia Branch, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴³³ Stars and Stripes, ISIS in Afghanistan was 'obliterated' but fighters who escaped could stage resurgence, 10 February 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Weakened ISIL's sectarian agenda exacts heavy toll in Afghanistan, 2 April 2020, [url](#); Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴³⁴ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 71

⁴³⁵ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 66

ISKP cells continue to be present ‘throughout Afghanistan’,⁴³⁶ including in Kunar and probably in parts of Nuristan province.⁴³⁷ Smaller groups of supporters were said to be in locations such as in Kapisa, Baghlan,⁴³⁸ and Faryab.⁴³⁹ In March 2020, AAN reported that some small groups of 15-20 ISKP fighters were still operating in remote districts of Nangarhar (Deh Bala, Pachir wa Agam, Khogyani) in villages with a dominant ISKP mindset.⁴⁴⁰

Other reporting on ISKP presence relate to reported clearance and arrest operations. On 14 March 2020, the Taliban claimed that their *Mujahideen* (fighters) cleared several villages in Mungai District of Kunar Province.⁴⁴¹ Afghan forces have also conducted anti-ISKP operations and claimed to have made ‘hundreds’ of arrests in Jalalabad and Kabul, as of May 2020.⁴⁴² Local media also quoted the Badakhshan Governor in April 2020, following the ISKP defeats in Helmand and Nangarhar Provinces, saying that the group tied its links with Al-Qaeda (composed of foreign fighters) to build a new ‘Caliphate’ based in Dara-i Khustak, Jurm District of Badakhshan Province. Local officials claimed in local media that there were 600 Daesh and Al-Qaeda families (some from Asian countries) settled in the Dara-i Khustak. In addition to Jurm District, in Warduj and Raghistan Districts of Badakhshan Province, other insurgent groups including Ansarullah network, the eastern Turkestan group, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan are ‘working directly’ with ISKP and Al-Qaeda.⁴⁴³

According to AAN analyst Obaid Ali, as of March 2020, the government controlled most of the low-lying areas of Nangarhar, while the Taliban expanded their controls over the remote areas where ISKP had the majority of its remaining bases.⁴⁴⁴ Regarding the ISKP, a UN Security Council report noted that:

‘it remains capable of mounting attacks in various parts of the country, including Kabul, but some of those claimed may have arisen wholly or partly from a tactical accommodation with the Haqqani Network. The main risk of ISIL-K resurgence in the context of the Afghan peace process may lie in its ability to present itself as the only defiant terror group in the country and attract new recruits and funding accordingly.’⁴⁴⁵

The UN report remarked that according to its information ‘debate continues’ about the extent to which ISKP can carry out high profile attacks, especially complex operations in Kabul, noting that there is alleged involvement and assistance from the Haqqani Network. Attacks ISKP claims for itself may have been carried out by Haqqani Network. ISKP’s strategic capability is described as limited in Afghanistan.⁴⁴⁶ The UN stated that ISKP has carried out four attacks in Kabul in the first three months of 2020, compared to four such attacks during all of 2019, with no clear reason for the increase.⁴⁴⁷ Senior Afghan security officials have reportedly drawn the conclusion about ISKP’s

⁴³⁶ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 72

⁴³⁷ RFE/RL, The Taliban, The Government, And Islamic State: Who Controls What In Afghanistan, 31 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴³⁸ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, Report to the United States Congress, 1 October – 31 December 2019, 5 February 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁴³⁹ UN Security Council, Twenty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/53, 20 January 2020, [url](#), para. 53

⁴⁴⁰ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴¹ Voice of Jihad, Daesh militants face major defeat in Kunar as entire province rescued from its evil, 14 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴² UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 72

⁴⁴³ Ariana News, Daesh, Al-Qaeda to establish Islamic Caliphate in Badakhshan, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁴ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁵ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁴⁶ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 73, 76

⁴⁴⁷ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 75

operations that ‘all the attacks claimed by ISKP depended on the same supply and logistics chain used for supplying attacks by the Taliban’ including the Haqqani network. All groups outsourced their logistics to a ‘single criminal-terrorist network’ with a monopoly likely supported by corrupt officials. Afghan officials refuted several ISKP-claimed attacks attributing them to Taliban or Haqqani actors.⁴⁴⁸

In the UN Security Council report of May 2020, Afghan officials ‘cautioned’ that ISKP ‘still retained cells throughout Afghanistan for the purpose of carrying out high profile attacks.’⁴⁴⁹

On 6 May 2020, NDS carried out three attacks against ISKP hideouts in Kabul province, including two in PD11 and one in Shakar Dara District (outside of Kabul City), in which five insurgents were killed and eight others wounded. The group was composed of members of ISKP and Haqqani Network led by those involved in several attacks including the [March 2020] attack on Sikh temple in Kabul.⁴⁵⁰ While this attack was claimed by ISKP, AAN reported that some Afghan officials pointed to Haqqani Network and Indian officials have said the Pakistani Lashkar-e Tayyiba were the perpetrators.⁴⁵¹

Despite ISKP’s deteriorated military capabilities in Nangahar and Kunar provinces and to maintain territorial control in the latter provinces, the group reportedly claimed responsibility for several recent high-profile attacks, including the May attack on a maternity hospital in Kabul, the August attack in Jalalabad city prison and the November attack on Kabul University, and as well as the murder of a female Afghan journalist in Nangarhar on 10 December.⁴⁵² The ISKP’s August 2020 attack in Jalalabad notably demonstrated group’s new tactic and surge in its capabilities.⁴⁵³

On 15 June 2020, The News International reported that ISKP is reaching out to 8 000 foreign *jihadists* who are present in Afghanistan including 6 500 Pakistani nationals.⁴⁵⁴ The UN Security Council report of January 2021 reported that there were an estimated number of 1 000 to 2 200 ISKP fighters across several provinces of Afghanistan.⁴⁵⁵

The UN Security Council report of February 2021 indicated that:

‘in June 2020, Shahab al-Muhajir, also known as Sanaullah was appointed by the ISIL core to lead ISIL-K. The communiqué announcing the appointment, written in Arabic and translated into Pashto, referred to al-Muhajir as an experienced military leader and one of the “urban lions” of ISIL-K in Kabul who had been involved in guerrilla operations and the planning of suicide and complex attacks. Al-Muhajir was also appointed chief of the Al-Sadiq office of ISIL, which covers the “Khorasan” region, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Central Asian States.’⁴⁵⁶

According to UNAMA, in 2020, ISKP caused 673 civilian casualties including 213 killed and 460 wounded, which represented a 45 % decrease compared to 2019. Majority of the civilian casualties

⁴⁴⁸ Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, Peaceworks No. 162, 1 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 9-10

⁴⁴⁹ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 72

⁴⁵⁰ Tolonews, Afghan forces raid Daesh hideout north of Kabul, 6 May 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁵¹ Foschini, F., *Blood in the Abode of Peace*, 1 April 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵² UN Security Council, Twelfth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2021/98, 29 January 2021, [url](#), para. 34

⁴⁵³ UNOCHA, *Humanitarian needs overview, Afghanistan*, 19 December 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁵⁴ The News, *ISKP in Afghanistan*, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁵ UN Security Council, Twelfth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2021/98, 29 January 2021, [url](#), para 35

⁴⁵⁶ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), para. 60

caused by ISKP were resulted by ‘mass-casualty suicide attacks and mass-shootings in Kabul and Jalalabad’.⁴⁵⁷

1.3 Recent security trends and armed confrontations

According to ACLED data, between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021 there were 8 660 security incidents recorded in Afghanistan, of whom 5 682 were coded as battles, 2 435 explosions/remote violence, 9 riots and 534 incidents of violence against civilians.⁴⁵⁸ It has to be noted that ACLED made the following statement on its website regarding Afghanistan data:

‘ACLED is currently reviewing trends in coverage between 2019 and 2020 in Afghanistan. We believe a shift in reporting by the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Taliban’s Voice of Jihad (VOJ) may have contributed to a trend depicting a reduction in violence. The team is currently supplementing coverage by drawing on additional sources. While this review is being undertaken, we would advise against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020.’⁴⁵⁹

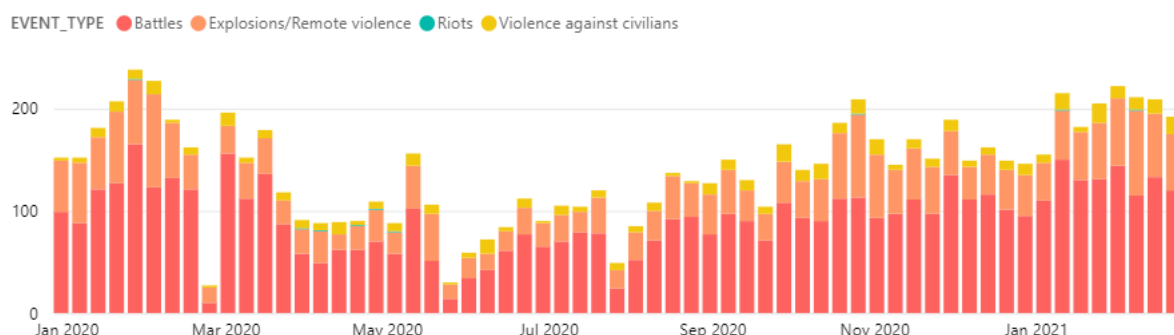


Figure 1: Afghanistan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence, riots and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data⁴⁶⁰

According to the UN Security Council report of March 2021, 25 180 security incidents took place in Afghanistan in 2020, which represented a 10 % increase compared to the same data in 2019.⁴⁶¹

According to several UN reports, issued between March 2020 and March 2021, the security situation in Afghanistan remained volatile or highly volatile⁴⁶² and deteriorated in 2020.⁴⁶³ In August 2020, Kate Clark reported that in Afghanistan there has been as much violence in 2020 as in 2019.⁴⁶⁴ On 18

⁴⁵⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 18

⁴⁵⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁹ ACLED, Curated data, Coverage notices, [url](#); See also: Clark, K., War in Afghanistan in 2020: Just as much violence, but no one wants to talk about it, AAN, 16 August 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁶¹ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/811–S/2021/252, 12 March 2021, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁶² UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/753–S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), para. 21; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/897–S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), para. 18; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/378–S/2020/809, 18 August 2020, [url](#), para. 18; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/634–S/2020/1182, 9 December 2020, [url](#), para. 18

⁴⁶³ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/811–S/2021/252, 12 March 2021, [url](#), para. 17

⁴⁶⁴ Clark, K., War in Afghanistan in 2020, just as much violence, but no one wants to talk about it, AAN, 16 August 2020, [url](#)

December 2020, the UN General Assembly report on situation in Afghanistan indicated that violence remained high in Afghanistan and that acts committed by the Taliban, including Haqqani Network, as well as Al-Qaida, and ISKP (Islamic State of Khorasan Province) and 'other terrorist and criminal groups' continue to be a threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan.⁴⁶⁵ The UN Security Council report of 3 February 2021 stated that the situation in Afghanistan remained challenging.⁴⁶⁶ In their annual report released in February 2021, UNAMA stated that:

'fighting continued throughout the year [2020], but two temporary ceasefires during successive *Eid* holidays largely held, and there was a drop in the number of civilian casualties documented in the first nine months. In stark contrast, the last three months of the year marked an uncharacteristic rise in civilian casualties – a critical indicator of the nature of the conflict. The year ended with increased focus on levels of violence and diminishing hopes for lasting peace'.⁴⁶⁷

On 29 February 2020, the US and the Taliban signed an agreement for bringing peace to Afghanistan.⁴⁶⁸ After signing the deal, the Taliban almost immediately resumed⁴⁶⁹ and intensified attacks against ANDSF.⁴⁷⁰ The group carried out more than 4 500 attacks in the 45 days following the signing of the deal across Afghanistan.⁴⁷¹ As reported in May 2020, Taliban have not launched any attacks on international forces since the deal was made in February; however, they have increased their attacks on Afghan government forces⁴⁷², including 76 attacks in 24 provinces within a week of signing the agreement.⁴⁷³ The US also resumed 'defensive' air strikes⁴⁷⁴, the first of which came five days after the deal.⁴⁷⁵ Agence France Presse (AFP) stated that since the US-Taliban agreement, Taliban attacks have been less frequent in cities but have continued to target Afghan government forces in rural areas; for example, a Taliban attack killed 11 pro-government militiamen in June 2020.⁴⁷⁶

As indicated by the UN Security Council, on 19 March 2020, the Afghan acting Minister of Defence announced an 'active defence posture' in response to the Taliban attacks. 'The day after high-profile attacks on 12 May targeting a hospital in Kabul and a funeral in Nangarhar, Mr Ghani announced that the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces would return to an "offensive posture", with a resumption of operations against the Taliban.'⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁶⁵ UN General Assembly, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December 2020, The situation in Afghanistan, A/RES/75/90, 18 December 2020, [url](#), para. 6

⁴⁶⁶ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), para. 57

⁴⁶⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 11

⁴⁶⁸ BBC News, Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18-year war, 29 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁹ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, report of the Secretary-General, A/74/897–S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), para 18

⁴⁷⁰ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Report to the United States Congress, 19 May 2020, [url](#), p. 11

⁴⁷¹ Reuters, Taliban step up attacks on Afghan forces since signing U.S. deal: data, 1 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷² RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Militants Kill Afghan Regional Police Chief in Latest Attack, 8 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷³ New York Times (The), Taliban ramp up attacks on Afghans after Trump says "no violence", 6 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁴ Military Times, US resumes airstrikes against Taliban to halt attack on Afghan forces, 4 March 2020, [url](#); See also: Reuters, U.S. Forces conduct airstrikes on Taliban in Afghanistan, 5 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁵ Military Times, US resumes airstrikes against Taliban to halt attack on Afghan forces, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁶ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Bomb Blamed on Taliban Kills 11 Pro-govt Afghan Militiamen, 6 June 2020, [url](#); The News, Attack blamed on Taliban kills seven Afghan policemen, 14 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁷ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/897–S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

Between 24-26 May 2020, a three-day ceasefire was declared between the Taliban and the government on the occasion of *Eid al-Fitr* (Muslim holiday).⁴⁷⁸ After the brief ceasefire, sources cited by Long War Journal (LWJ) indicated that the Taliban increased their attacks again in June 2020, intensifying assaults on government forces.⁴⁷⁹ Tolonews cited Afghan government sources claiming 'the Taliban initiated on average 30 attacks on the Afghan security forces each day after the *Eid al-Fitr* ceasefire.'⁴⁸⁰ In the second week of June, according to the MoI, 222 attacks were carried out in 29 provinces by the Taliban.⁴⁸¹

In June 2020, Tolonews quoted Afghan officials stating that ANDSF and the Taliban were fighting each other in Takhar, Jawzjan, Paktya, Helmand, Khost, Ghor, Kunduz, Badghis, Kandahar, Samangan, Faryab, Ghazni, Logar, Herat and Badakhshan provinces of Afghanistan.⁴⁸² Widespread fighting between the ANDSF and AGEs over the control of the Afghan highways was also reported in a July 2020 Tolonews report. The source indicated that as a result of [continued] fighting between the Taliban and ANDSF, insecurity has significantly increased on the highways, including on the Kabul-Logar-Paktya, Kabul-Baghlan, Baghlan-Kunduz, Pul-e Khumri-Samangan, Kabul -Jalalabad and Kabul-Kandahar highways.⁴⁸³

In December 2020, fighting continued in all Southern provinces of Afghanistan including in Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul, Uruzgan and Nimroz.⁴⁸⁴ Taliban reportedly carried out attacks against the ANDSF forces on the districts surrounding provincial capital of Kandahar, and carried out an offensive in Helmand. The government responded with 'heavy air and ground assaults'.⁴⁸⁵ Following continued attacks in Helmand, the Taliban captured Nad Ali district, and reached to "doorsteps" of the provincial capital, Lashkargah. ANA battalion and the police (who left their checkpoints in other areas of the And Ali district) focused their strength in the provincial capital and in *Chanjir* area to stop Taliban's advancements to the centre.⁴⁸⁶ ANA reportedly gave a 'reckless' response to the Taliban attacks⁴⁸⁷ as observed by UNAMA in 2020 indicating:

'Often, the Afghan National Army used indirect fire in populated residential areas, frequently in defence against Taliban attacks, repeatedly harming entire families when artillery shells or mortars landed on their home. As a result, seven out of 10 civilian casualties from the use of indirect fire by the ANA were women (22 per cent) and children (48 per cent).'

⁴⁸⁸

Tolonews documented '166 security incidents, including magnetic IED blasts, roadside bomb blasts, targeted attacks and Taliban offensives' in Afghanistan in February 2021.⁴⁸⁹ On 17 March 2021, Tolonews cited John Sopko, the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, stating that 'security remains the most crucial and enduring high-risk area for Afghanistan.'⁴⁹⁰ On 20 March 2021, Tolonews quoted security agencies stating that clashes between ANDSF and the Taliban took place in at least 40 % of the territory in Afghanistan during the last few weeks.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁷⁸ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghanistan's mass release of Taliban prisoners revives peace process, but seen as "big gamble", 28 May 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghans sides agree to rare cease-fire during Eid al-Fitr, 24 May 2020, [url](#); BBC News, Afghanistan: Taliban announce three-day Eid ceasefire with government, 24 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁹ Roggio, B., Taliban ramps up attacks after ending unilateral ceasefire, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁰ Tolonews, After ceasefire, Taliban average "30 attacks per day": sources, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸¹ Tolonews, 171 Govt forces killed in a week in Taliban attacks: officials, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸² Tolonews, ANDSF fighting Taliban in 15 provinces amid peace efforts, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸³ Tolonews, Fierce widespread fighting surges to control highways, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 – 20 December 2020, 23 December 2020, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁸⁵ Military.com, Scores of Taliban militants killed as fighting rocks insurgents bastion, 13 December 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁶ AAN, Living with the Taliban (2): Local experiences in Nad Ali district, Helmand province, 18 January 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁷ Clark, K., Civilian casualties worsen as intra-Afghan talks began, says UNAMA's 2020 report on the protection of civilians, AAN, 23 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 63

⁴⁸⁹ Tolonews, 270 people killed in Afghanistan in the past month, 1 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁰ Tolonews, Taliban violence remains high in Afghanistan, says Sopko, 17 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁹¹ Tolonews, 1399 a tough year for Afghan forces: Miakhil, 20 March 2021, [url](#)

1.3.1 Armed clashes and assaults

In 2020, UNAMA observed an increase in civilian casualties caused by ground engagements for the first time since 2016, which represents 36 % of all civilian casualties in 2020. Between 1 January and 31 December 2020, ground engagements in Afghanistan caused 3 154 civilian casualties including 872 killed and 2 282 injured, and the number of people killed by ground engagements represented a 14 % increase compared to 2019.⁴⁹²

Between May 2020 and February 2021, several armed clashes took place between ANDSF and AGEs, for example in Kunduz⁴⁹³, Paktya and Paktika⁴⁹⁴, Ghor⁴⁹⁵, Khost⁴⁹⁶, Kapisa⁴⁹⁷, Kandahar⁴⁹⁸, Laghman⁴⁹⁹ and Balkh.⁵⁰⁰ On 23 February 2021, Reuters reported that there has been a surge in clashes throughout Afghanistan.⁵⁰¹

1.3.2 Improvised Explosive Devices

Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are unconventional explosive weapons that can take any form and can be activated in different ways, targeting soldiers and civilians alike.⁵⁰² IEDs can be operated by the victim (Victim Operated IEDs) or by the attacker (Command-Operated IEDs). Command-Operated IEDs are radio or remote-controlled allowing operators to detonate a pre-placed device at a specific time. Victim-Operated IEDs on the other hand detonate when a person or vehicle triggers the initiator or switch (pressure plate or pressure release mechanism, trip wire or another device). Another category is suicide IEDs where either the attacker wears an explosive vest or belt, or a vehicle is rigged with explosives by a driver or passenger inside.⁵⁰³

Although pressure plate IEDs are typically used by AGEs to target security forces, they are planted on public roads routinely used by civilians. Accordingly, their use is inherently indiscriminate as the 'effects cannot be directed against a specific target.'⁵⁰⁴

UNAMA indicated that in 2020, 'suicide and non-suicide IEDs continued to cause grave harm to civilians across Afghanistan' by anti-Government Elements. During the period between 1 January and 31 December 2020, suicide and non-suicide IEDs caused 3 042 civilian casualties including 872 killed and 2 170 injured, which represents a 30 % decrease compared to the year 2019. During the same period, pressure-plate IEDs caused 878 civilian casualties including 488 killed and 390 injured, which represents a 35 % increase compared to 2019.⁵⁰⁵ In February 2020, the Taliban published a

⁴⁹² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 71

⁴⁹³ Tolonews, "3 police, 5 Taliban killed" in Kunduz clashes, 15 May 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 4 Policemen killed in Kunduz clashes, 2 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁴ TKG, Clashes in Paktia and Paktika leave 35 Taliban fighters killed, 17 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁵ Ariana News, Nine police killed in Ghor, Kandahar clashes, 13 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁶ Afghanistan Times, Armed conflict in Khost leaves eight dead, 13 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁷ Khaama Press, Taliban militants suffer heavy casualties in Kapisa clashes, 15 June 2020, [url](#); Ariana News, Clashes underway in Kapisa, 16 Taliban militants killed, 19 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁸ Ariana News, Taliban killed, wounded in Kandahar clashes, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁹ Khaama Press, 22 Taliban militants killed, wounded on Kabul-Jalalabad highway, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁰ Tolonews, 9 ANA soldiers were killed in Balkh clashes, 24 January 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰¹ Reuters, Blasts, clashes intensify across Afghanistan, 23 February 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰² NATO, Improvised explosive devices, 12 December 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices, October 2018, [url](#), p. 10

⁵⁰⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices, October 2018, [url](#), p. 8

⁵⁰⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 44 and 48

magazine titled *Haqiqat* (fact), in which it was indicated that an IED could be planted by the Taliban fighters on a public road to target the enemy as long as civilians were informed in advance.⁵⁰⁶

In its quarterly report of 30 January 2021, SIGAR reported on an increase in the number of ‘magnetic or small, vehicle-adhering bombs (often called “sticky bombs”)’ in Kabul City used by the Taliban and other AGEs to target Afghan government officials, civil-society leaders, and journalists.⁵⁰⁷ During the period between 20 January and 19 February 2021, 39 IED blasts reportedly took place in Kabul.⁵⁰⁸

1.3.3 High profile attacks

During the period from 1 January to 31 December 2020, UNAMA documented 1 906 civilian casualties including 764 killed and 1 142 injured from attacks that deliberately targeted civilians, which represented a 33 % decrease compared to 2019.⁵⁰⁹

According to UNAMA, in 2020, suicide attacks (including complex attacks) by AGEs caused 746 civilian casualties including 145 killed and 601 injured, which represented a 64 % decrease compared to 2019.⁵¹⁰

1.3.4 Targeted killings and conflict-related abduction

In 2020, UNAMA documented 1 086 conflict-related abductions, 99 % of which attributed to the Taliban, which caused 113 civilian casualties including 77 killed and 36 injured. These numbers represent twice the level of abduction-related casualties compared to 2019.⁵¹¹

According to UNAMA, in 2020, targeted killings, including ‘assassinations’ of civilians, caused 1 248 civilian casualties including 707 killed and 541 injured, which represented a 45 % increase compared to the same period in 2019. 94 % of these civilian casualties were caused by Anti-Government Elements. Of these, 761 civilian casualties, including 459 killed and 302 injured, were attributed to the Taliban, amounting to a 22 % increase compared to 2019.⁵¹²

According to UNAMA Special Report, in 2020, 14 Human Rights defenders and 9 journalists have been deliberately killed and 2 (Human Rights defenders and journalists) were targeted and killed in January 2021. According to the source, in nearly all cases, no one claimed responsibility for these killings.⁵¹³

During the period between January 2020 and February 2021, several targeted killings and conflict related abductions with impact on civilian population took place across Afghanistan.⁵¹⁴

⁵⁰⁶ Voice of Jihad, مجله حقیقت [informal translation: ‘*Haqiqat* (Truth) magazine’], 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 39

⁵⁰⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 51

⁵⁰⁸ Tolonews, 51 people killed in Kabul security, crime incidents in a month, 19 February 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 52

⁵¹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 46

⁵¹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 58

⁵¹² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 16

⁵¹³ UNAMA, Special Report: killing of human rights defenders, journalists and media workers in Afghanistan, 2018-2021, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 8-10

⁵¹⁴ Khaama Press, Media staff killed in Afghanistan’s southern province Helmand, 2 January 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Unknown gunmen kill head of a primary court in Herat, 18 February 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report, April 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban militants open fire on youths who were playing cricket, 15 April 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 30 July 2020, [url](#); New York Times (the), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (the), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

1.3.5 Aerial attacks and bombings

According to UNAMA, during the period from 1 January to 31 December 2020, airstrikes by Pro-Government Forces caused 693 civilian casualties including 341 killed and 352 injured, which represented a 34 % decrease compared to 2019. UNAMA attributed 526 civilian casualties, including 234 killed and 292 injured, to the Afghan Air Force, which represented a 126 % increase compared to 2019. UNAMA attributed 17 % of airstrike civilian casualties of all airstrikes in 2020 to the international military forces in Afghanistan.⁵¹⁵

1.3.6 Search operations

In February 2021, UNAMA noted that

‘search operations are a military tactic used in Afghanistan by Pro-Government Forces to capture or kill persons they believe to be Anti-Government Element targets, usually involving entering and searching homes or other civilian structures, and often carried out at night. Often referred to as “night raids”.’⁵¹⁶

According to UNAMA, in 2020, search operations, which are also referred as ‘night raids’ caused 21 civilian casualties including 19 killed and two injured by pro-Government forces, which represented a 94 % decrease compared to 2019. Of these, 15 civilian deaths were attributed to the Afghan national security forces.⁵¹⁷

1.3.7 Explosive Remnants of War

According to UNAMA, Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) refer to unexploded ordnance (UXO) and abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO). During the period from 1 January to 31 December 2020, UNAMA documented 394 civilian casualties including 103 killed and 291 injured caused by Explosive Remnants of War, which represented a 24 % decrease compared to 2019. The source also indicated that ‘children made up almost eight out of every ten civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war, amounting to 314 child casualties (84 killed and 230 injured)’.⁵¹⁸

1.4 Impact of the violence on the civilian population

1.4.1 Civilian casualties

Year	Civilians killed	Civilians injured	Total civilian casualties
Q1 2021	573	1 210	1 783
2020	3 035	5 785	8 820
2019	3 403	6 989	10 392
2018	3 804	7 189	10 993
2017	3 440	7 019	10 459
2016	3 527	7 925	11 452

⁵¹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 66

⁵¹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 107

⁵¹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 62, 64, 107

⁵¹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 77, 105

2015	3 565	7 470	11 035
2014	3 701	6 834	10 535
2013	2 969	5 669	8 638
2012	2 769	4 821	7 590
2011	3 133	4 709	7 842
2010	2 794	4 368	7 162
2009	2 412	3 557	5 969

Figure 2: Source: UNAMA Protection of civilians in armed conflict

In 2020, UNAMA documented 8 820 civilian casualties, including 3 035 killed and 5 785 injured, because of the armed conflict, which represented a 15 % decrease compared to 2019 and ‘the lowest number of civilian casualties since 2013.’⁵¹⁹ The decrease of civilian casualties as compared to 2019 was due to a decrease of civilian casualties from suicide attacks by AGEs,⁵²⁰ including by the Taliban and ISKP; the decrease in airstrikes by international military forces;⁵²¹ and the decrease of civilian casualties resulting from ‘search operations by PGFs’.⁵²²

The lowest number in civilian casualties in 2020 was documented in the first quarter of the year (564 deaths and 823 injured), which coincided with the reduction in violence (RIV) week prior to the signing of the agreement between the US and the Taliban on 29 February in Doha.⁵²³ However, the figures revealed an increase in the second quarter of 2020 (740 deaths and 1 388 injured),⁵²⁴ for which sources reported a spike in violence, leading to civilian casualties.⁵²⁵ According to SIGAR, during the second quarter of 2020, civilian casualties increased by nearly 60 % compared to the first quarter of the year, and by 18 % compared to the same period in 2019.⁵²⁶ As reported by the UNAMA, the start of the Afghanistan Peace Negotiation on 12 September in Qatar did not bring a decrease in civilian casualties.⁵²⁷ On the contrary, the fourth quarter of 2020 revealed the highest number in civilian casualties in 2020 (891 deaths and 1 901 injured), which was a 45 % increase compared to the same period of 2019.⁵²⁸

As reported by UNAMA, ground engagements were the leading cause of civilian casualties in 2020 (36 % of all civilian casualties), followed by the use of IEDs (34.5 %) and targeted killings (14 %). Ground engagements caused 3 154 civilian casualties (872 deaths and 2 282 injured) in 2020, compared to 3 061 civilian casualties in 2019. The use of indirect fire weapons—including artillery shells, mortars, and rockets—in populated areas caused the largest number of civilian casualties of

⁵¹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 11

⁵²⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Third Quarter Report: 1 January to 30 September 2020, October 2020, [url](#), p. 1; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 15, 17

⁵²¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Third Quarter Report: 1 January to 30 September 2020, October 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 11

⁵²² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 15

⁵²³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-12

⁵²⁴ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/634 – S/2020/1182, 9 December 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 11

⁵²⁵ AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Afghanistan’s civilian casualties rise following U.S.-Taliban peace deal, 19 March 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan Deaths Pile Up in Uncertainty Over U.S. Deal With Taliban, 27 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵²⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 65

⁵²⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Third Quarter Report: 1 January to 30 September 2020, October 2020, [url](#), p. 3; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 11

⁵²⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 11, 13

this incident type.⁵²⁹ Ground engagements constituted almost a quarter of civilian casualties attributed by UNAMA to the Taliban.⁵³⁰

According to UNAMA, 62 % of civilian casualties in 2020 (1 885 deaths and 3 574 injured) were attributed to AGEs: 45 % to the Taliban, 8 % to ISKP, and 9 % to undetermined AGEs.⁵³¹ While these figures reveal a 15 % overall decrease in civilian casualties attributed to AGEs compared to 2019, the number of civilians killed by AGEs increased by 13 %. The decrease in civilian casualties caused by AGEs in 2020, as compared to 2019, was due to the absence of election-related attacks⁵³² and to the decrease in civilian casualties from complex and large scale suicide attacks in urban centres by AGEs, especially the Taliban, following the U.S.-Taliban agreement.⁵³³ However, UNAMA reported on the increase in civilian casualties from non-suicide IEDs and targeted killings attributed to AGEs.⁵³⁴ Moreover, reporting on a 79 % decrease in civilian casualties from Taliban-conducted suicide attacks, including complex attacks, compared to 2019,⁵³⁵ UNAMA noted that in 2019 the Taliban caused the highest number of civilian casualties from suicide attacks since UNAMA began its systematic documentation in 2009.⁵³⁶ In the last quarter of 2020, SIGAR Resolute Support (RS) attributed about 93 % of civilian casualties to AGEs (43 % to the Taliban, 41 % to unknown insurgents, and 9 % to ISKP).⁵³⁷

UNAMA attributed 826 civilian casualties (202 deaths and 624 injured) to undetermined AGEs which represented a 158 % increase compared to 2019.⁵³⁸ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) documented 2 107 civilian casualties (857 deaths and 1 250 injured) caused by unknown actors, which, according to AIHRC data, was more than a 100 % increase compared to 2019.⁵³⁹ The increase in the number of civilian casualties neither claimed by, nor attributed to any group by UNAMA coincided with the decrease in claims of responsibility by the Taliban and ISKP.⁵⁴⁰ Furthermore, as reported by UNAMA, suicide and non-suicide IEDs constituted 78 % of all incidents, which were attributed to undetermined AGEs and caused high numbers of civilian casualties, particularly in provincial capitals.⁵⁴¹

In 2020, the leading cause of harm to civilians by AGEs were suicide and non-suicide IEDs, which caused 3 042 civilian casualties (872 deaths and 2 170 injured). This figure revealed a 30 % decrease compared to 2019, which was due to a 64 % reduction in civilian casualties from suicide IEDs, including complex attacks.⁵⁴² Non-suicide IEDs used by AGEs caused 2 296 civilian casualties (727 deaths and 1 569 injured) and the number of civilians killed by non-suicide IEDs, particularly by victim-activated pressure-plate IEDs and vehicle-borne non-suicide IEDs,⁵⁴³ increased by 43 % compared to 2019, while the number of civilians injured decreased by 10 %.⁵⁴⁴ Pressure plate IEDs caused 35 % more civilian casualties compared to 2019, with the Taliban responsible for almost all incidents.⁵⁴⁵ Furthermore, UNAMA documented 769 civilian casualties (182 killed and 587 injured)

⁵²⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 15

⁵³⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 43

⁵³¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 17, 41

⁵³² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 40-41

⁵³³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 11

⁵³⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 11, 15, 41

⁵³⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 17-18, 41

⁵³⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 46

⁵³⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 54

⁵³⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 18, 41, 43

⁵³⁹ AIHRC, Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2020, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 13, 18, 41, 44

⁵⁴¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 44

⁵⁴² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 15-16, 44

⁵⁴³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 17-18

⁵⁴⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 15-16, 47

⁵⁴⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 16

from IED attacks, which targeted civilians or civilian objects, particularly the employees of the Afghan government.⁵⁴⁶

According to UNAMA, pro-government armed groups, which caused 2 231 civilian casualties (841 deaths and 1 390 injured),⁵⁴⁷ were responsible for 25 % of civilian casualties in Afghanistan in 2020.⁵⁴⁸ A 24 % decrease compared to 2019⁵⁴⁹ resulted from a decrease in civilian casualties caused by international military forces⁵⁵⁰ and PGF' search operations, particularly after the agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban reached on 29 February 2020. International military forces caused 120 civilian casualties (89 deaths and 31 injured), which was the lowest number since UNAMA started the systematic documentation in 2009.⁵⁵¹ As reported by AIHRC, PGF and the international military forces were responsible for 1 249 civilian casualties in 2020 (386 deaths and 863 injured), compared to 1 490 civilian casualties in 2019.⁵⁵² However, as noted by SIGAR, the number of civilians killed by ANDSF airstrikes increased by over 11 % in the fourth quarter of 2020, accounting to 54 % of all ANDSF-caused casualties in 2020.⁵⁵³

Next to the reduction of civilian casualties due to international military offensives in 2020, the figures for civilian casualties attributed by UNAMA to the ANA, including the Afghan Air Force (AAF), were the highest since UNAMA started systematic documentation in 2009.⁵⁵⁴ The AAF caused 76 % of civilian casualties from airstrikes in 2020, which was a 126 % increase compared to 2019 and the highest number of civilian casualties caused by AAF since in 2009.⁵⁵⁵

ANSF caused 1 906 civilian casualties (674 deaths and 1 232 injured), which was a 13 % increase in comparison to 2019 and the highest number since 2016. In the interview with EASO on 27 July 2020, co-Director of the AAN Kate Clark noted that 'government forces do not always discriminate in their targeting, as seen in the recent UNAMA Protection of Civilians midyear report which detailed civilian casualties resulting from indirect fire and airstrikes. The ANSF have never taken civilian casualties seriously. They have never done proper investigations and compensation. There is rarely any disciplinary action.'⁵⁵⁶

In the first quarter of 2021, the number of civilian casualties increased by 29 % when compared to the same period of 2020, reaching the figure of 1 783 civilian casualties (573 deaths and 1 210 injured). The leading causes of civilian casualties in the first quarter of 2021 were ground engagements (38 %), non-suicide IEDs (31 %), and targeted killings (19 %). According to UNAMA, AEGs were responsible for 61 % of civilian casualties in the period, while the use of non-suicide IEDs by AEGs increased by 117 % compared to the first quarter of 2020.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁴⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 44

⁵⁴⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 19

⁵⁴⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 13, 17, 61

⁵⁴⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 19

⁵⁵⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 13, 19

⁵⁵¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 19

⁵⁵² AIHRC, Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2020, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁵³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), pp. 53-54

⁵⁵⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 11, 13, 15, 19

⁵⁵⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 16

⁵⁵⁶ Clark K., AAN, online video interview with EASO, 27 July 2020, in EASO, COI Report Afghanistan - Security Situation, September 2020, p. 41

⁵⁵⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, First Quarter Update: 1 January to 31 March 2021, 14 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 1-4

1.4.2 State ability to secure law and order

The World Justice Project's (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2020 ranked Afghanistan 122 out of 128 countries⁵⁵⁸, allocating it to the last place in the 'order and security' factor.⁵⁵⁹ In its report for the first quarter of 2020, UNAMA noted 'an increase in civilian deaths from intentional targeting of civilians,' as compared to 2019, referring particularly to March 2020 mass-shooting incidents by ISKP and targeted killings, abductions, and planting of IEDs by the Taliban.⁵⁶⁰ UN Secretary-General reported in December 2020 on 389 targeted killings perpetrated in the period from 13 July to 12 November 2020, which represented a 21 % increase compared to the same period in 2019.⁵⁶¹

Following the explosion in a Sikh temple in Shorbazar area of Kabul in March 2020, 'Sikhs and Hindus' accused the government of negligence, as reported by local media.⁵⁶² Similarly, the explosion in Wazir Akbar Khan mosque in Kabul at the beginning of June 2020 was reported to cause 'strong anger and a public outcry over the fragile security situation in the country.'⁵⁶³ As reported by the Associated Press (AP) in February 2021, targeted killings, whose perpetrators remained unknown, increased tensions in the country: with the Afghan government blaming the Taliban and the Taliban denying its responsibility, 'suspicions' were reported to start raising 'that militias run by prominent warlords both allied with and opposed to the government are creating chaos.'⁵⁶⁴ As noted by the Washington Post in January 2021, no other case, except the killing of the executive director of the non-profit Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan on 23 December 2020, for which the police arrested two Taliban members, was 'reported solved and no official tally of the toll has been released,' which created an environment of 'wider fears' and 'raised speculation about an array of possible origins and motives' of the killings.⁵⁶⁵

In 2020 and the beginning of 2021, judicial officials continued to be targeted.⁵⁶⁶ As reported by UNAMA in June 2020, 'no case of an attack against the judiciary was ever sufficiently investigated to indict the crime.' In a situation of 'poor security and direct threats to judges,' female judges in particular were reported to be reluctant 'to work in remote districts.'⁵⁶⁷ According to SIGAR, in July 2020, the Afghan government reported on an absence of a prosecutor in 193 districts out of 398 districts and the dispatching of 24 prosecutors to 17 previously insecure districts by the Attorney General's Office to meet 'their anticorruption strategy benchmark to introduce at least 20 prosecutors to insecure districts.'⁵⁶⁸

In February 2020, as reported by the UN Secretary-General, the Afghan cabinet endorsed the regulation prepared by the Government and Media Joint Committee to protect journalists and media workers. The Council reported also on the arrest of eight out of 18 persons suspected of threatening AIHRC human rights defenders involved 'in researching of the practice of *bacha bazi*' in

⁵⁵⁸ WJP, Rule of Law Index 2020, n.d., [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁵⁹ WJP, Rule of Law Index 2020, n.d., [url](#), pp. 26, 33

⁵⁶⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, First Quarter Report, April 2020, [url](#), pp. 4-5

⁵⁶¹ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/634-S/2020/1182, 9 December 2020, [url](#), para. 18

⁵⁶² Tolonews, 25 Killed in Attack at Dharamshala, Sikh Temple in Kabul, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁶³ Tolonews, Burial Held for Imam Killed by Blast, Public Outcry Continues, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁴ AP, Crime, conflict, chaos crushing Afghan hopes for tomorrow, 4 February 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁵ Washington Post (The), The mysterious murder of an Afghan election monitor sends a chill through Kabul, 9 January 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁶ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/634-S/2020/1182, 9 December 2020, [url](#), para. 45; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 50; BBC News, Afghanistan: A year of violence on the road to peace, 28 February 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan's Fight Against Corruption Crucial for Peace and Prosperity, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 40-41

⁵⁶⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#), p. 118

Logar province.⁵⁶⁹ Throughout 2020, the Taliban⁵⁷⁰ and government officials continued threatening journalists even after the government dropped a proposed law to impose restrictions on media.⁵⁷¹ UNAMA reported on a 'sharp' increase in the number of targeted killings of human rights defenders in 2020.⁵⁷² As noted by UNAMA, targeting of journalists and civil society leaders in various locations in the country, including Kabul's green zone, influenced also by the lack of claims of responsibility by any of the groups, 'has generated a climate of fear among the civilian population of the country in an unprecedented way.'⁵⁷³

As reported by HRW, a local radio station correspondent was shot dead alongside at least three protestors and two police officers in May 2020 during the protests 'over allegations of unfair bread distribution during a lockdown implemented between March and June to stop the spread of COVID-19' in Chaghcharan, the provincial capital of Ghor. As the police and protestors disagree on who had opened fire first, the results of the investigation by the government were not made public.⁵⁷⁴

In 2020, a rise in criminality was reported across the country.⁵⁷⁵ The increase in criminality in Kabul city,⁵⁷⁶ even in its relatively safe central areas,⁵⁷⁷ reportedly turned the Afghan capital into 'one of the most dangerous places for businessmen, foreigners, local officials and ordinary people.'⁵⁷⁸ Crime cases reported by media in 2020 and the first quarter of 2021 comprised kidnapping of adults⁵⁷⁹ and children,⁵⁸⁰ robberies and burglaries,⁵⁸¹ murder,⁵⁸² gunfire,⁵⁸³ and accidental killing during a gunfight between criminal groups.⁵⁸⁴ According to the researcher Fabrizio Foschini, Kabul police faced corruption and a lack of staff to investigate criminal cases; moreover, criminals and the police were reported to have tight relations in some of the neighbourhoods, which prevented legal prosecution.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁶⁹ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/753-S/220/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), para. 47, 48

⁵⁷⁰ Npr, Amid A Wave of Targeted Killings In Afghanistan, She's No. 11 On A Murder List, 21 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁷¹ HRW, Afghanistan – Events of 2020, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁷² UNAMA, Special Report: Killing of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Media Workers in Afghanistan, 2018-2021, February 2021, [url](#), p. 22

⁵⁷³ UNAMA, Special Report: Killing of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Media Workers in Afghanistan, 2018-2021, February 2021, [url](#), p. 25

⁵⁷⁴ HRW, Afghanistan – Events of 2020, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁷⁵ AP, Crime, conflict, chaos crushing Afghan hopes for tomorrow, 4 February 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime? 8 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁶ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The roots of today's underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, updated on 9 March 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime? 8 February 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Kabul Residents Call on Security Forces to Crackdown on Crime, 22 February 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Crime Rate in Kabul Rising Despite Govt's Assurances: Residents, 8 May 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal activities and the police response, AAN, 21 February 2020, updated 9 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁸ Bakhtiari, D., Kabul Accommodate the Richest and the Poorest – Never Feel Secure, Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 22 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁹ Tolonews, Kidnapped for Ransom, Kabul Man Shares Ordeal, 10 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁰ Tolonews, Eight-Year-Old Boy Abducted, Killed in Kabul, 16 March 2020, [url](#); AP, Crime, conflict, chaos crushing Afghan hopes for tomorrow, 4 February 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁸¹ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal activities and the police response, AAN, 21 February 2020, updated 9 March 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Kabul Residents Call on Security Forces to Crackdown on Crime, 22 February 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Armed Robberies Persist, Kabul Residents Demand Action, 5 January 2021, [url](#); AP, Crime, conflict, chaos crushing Afghan hopes for tomorrow, 4 February 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁸² New York Times (The), They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime? 8 February 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 2 Killed in Kabul Amid Rising Crime in City, 20 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸³ Tolonews, Nine Men 'Mysteriously' Killed in Kabul, 16 February 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Kabul: 1 Killed, Another Wounded in Criminal Incidents, 7 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁴ Tolonews, Crimes in Kabul's 'Most Secure Areas' Alarm Residents, 24 May 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁵ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal activities and the police response, AAN, 21 February 2020, updated 9 March 2020, [url](#)

Besides Kabul, the cities of Jalalabad, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif were reported to face 'similar spikes in criminal activity.' In 2019, Kunduz was reported to face a deterioration in security situation 'due to a lack of governance, a resurgent Taliban and an increasing crime rate', while police were reported to be unable to stop robberies and extortions in the city.⁵⁸⁶ The criminal incidents in the major cities, reported by local media in 2020 and the beginning of 2021 comprise incidents of kidnapping,⁵⁸⁷ armed robberies⁵⁸⁸, and murders.⁵⁸⁹ In January 2021, Pajhwok Afghan News quoted the governor of Herat, stating that 42 people were arrested over the period of the previous three months on charges of kidnappings, 17 were charged with terrorist attacks, 16 with armed robberies, nine with corruption, and 50 others with other crimes committed in the province.⁵⁹⁰ The same month, the Balkh authorities stated that they 'accelerated efforts at controlling crimes.'⁵⁹¹

In June 2020, USDOD reported that 'insurgent, terrorist, and criminal networks' were getting revenues from 'drug trafficking, illegal taxation, extortion, illicit mining, and foreign financial support' while corruption undermined 'ANDSF readiness and combat power.'⁵⁹²

According to the 2020 Asia Foundation survey, almost half of the respondents 'strongly agreed' that the Afghan National Police (ANP) was 'honest and fair with the Afghan people', which displayed an 8 % increase compared to 2019. Moreover, 54 % of the respondents 'strongly' agreed and 28 % 'somewhat' agreed that ANP 'helps improve security in the country'.⁵⁹³

More detailed information on the state structure and governance in Afghanistan, including on state judiciary, its capacity, integrity, effectiveness in prosecution can be found in [EASO COI Report Afghanistan, State Structure and Security Forces, August 2020](#).

1.4.3 COVID-19 and health care

In its report for the second quarter of 2020 UNOCHA noted that GoA-imposed lockdown measures were not strictly enforced after April 2020.⁵⁹⁴ At the end of February 2021, Afghanistan started a COVID-19 vaccination programme, initially aiming at vaccination of security force members, health workers, and journalists.⁵⁹⁵

As reported by UNAMA, in April 2020, a Taliban spokesperson posted on Twitter that the Taliban would suspend the fighting if COVID-19 occurred in an area under their control to enable necessary services by health professionals.⁵⁹⁶ While initially the Taliban rejected the call of the government of Afghanistan (GoA) for a nationwide ceasefire to ensure a safe passage for health workers, later the group declared a three-day ceasefire, which coincided with the *Eid al-Fitr* (24 – 26 May 2020) celebration.⁵⁹⁷ This was followed by another ceasefire during the *Eid al-Adha* (31 July – 2 August 2020).⁵⁹⁸ In October 2020, UNAMA reported that the COVID-19 crisis did not lead to any

⁵⁸⁶ Latifi, A. M., Ehsan, E., Surviving Kunduz: Crime and violence swamp neglected Afghan city once hailed as model of governance, The New Arab, 2 August 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁷ Tolonews, Calls Mounts for Rescue of Kidnapped Boy, 1 December 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁸ Khaama Press, Clash between police forces, armed robbers leave 3 dead, wounded, 16 April 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁹ Khaama Press, Three Civilians Including A Child, Found Dead: Herat, 19 December 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Crimes at peak in Mazar-i-Sharif, complain residents, 20 January 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, In 3 months, 134 crime suspects arrested in Herat, 2 January 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Crimes at peak in Mazar-i-Sharif, complain residents, 20 January 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁹² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 17, 32

⁵⁹³ Asia Foundation (The), Afghanistan Flash Surveys on Perceptions of Peace, Covid-19, and the Economy: Wave 1 Findings, 23 November 2020, [url](#), p. 36

⁵⁹⁴ UNOCHA, HAG Quarterly Report, April to June 2020, n.d., [url](#), p. 8

⁵⁹⁵ Reuters, Afghanistan begins COVID-19 vaccination drive amid rising violence, 23 February 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report: Attacks on Healthcare during the Covid-19 Pandemic, June 2020, [url](#), p.5

⁵⁹⁷ Ramachandran, S., COVID-19 and Afghanistan's Conflict Dynamics, CACI Analyst, 26 May 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁸ Reuters, Taliban announce three-day ceasefire in Afghanistan for Eid al-Adha, starting Friday, 28 July 2020, [url](#)

humanitarian ceasefire,⁵⁹⁹ noting also that both AGEs and PGFs were responsible for security incidents, including deliberate attacks of healthcare, which significantly disturbed healthcare delivery.⁶⁰⁰

According to researcher Ashley Jackson, the Taliban started the initiatives to distribute hand sanitizer and enforce quarantine measures as early as March 2020.⁶⁰¹ In March 2021, The New York Times reported that the Taliban was allowing health workers employed by the government to enter the areas under their control.⁶⁰² In April 2020, Al-Jazeera reported on the Taliban-launched public awareness campaign in the areas under the Taliban control, which were welcomed by the Afghan Ministry of Public Health. A person who described himself 'as the Taliban's newly-appointed director of public health of the Baghlan province,' was quoted to state that 'public awareness campaigns' were administered by the Taliban 'health commission' and that the Taliban was 'distributing pamphlets with advice on prevention of coronavirus.'⁶⁰³ The group was also reported to 'move its fighters from the battlefields for the COVID-19 campaign,' to enforce lockdowns in the affected areas,⁶⁰⁴ to disseminate personal protection equipment,⁶⁰⁵ and to order people who were suspected of being infected with COVID-19, particularly those who returned from Iran, to quarantine.⁶⁰⁶ As reported by The Economist in May 2020, the Taliban used social media to show 'militants handing out masks and advice on public health.' The GoA and aid charities were reported to welcome the initiatives as both needed to cooperate with the Taliban to provide services in rural areas.⁶⁰⁷

In 2020, health facilities and medical workers in Afghanistan continued to be targeted and threatened,⁶⁰⁸ despite the need for healthcare services increased because of COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁰⁹ In the period between 1 January and 31 December 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) recorded 89 incidents that occurred in 18 Afghanistan's provinces and affected 72 healthcare facilities, 57 of which were closed, 11 damaged, two destroyed, and another two looted. The provinces with the biggest numbers of closed healthcare facilities were Nuristan (17), Nangarhar (15), Helmand (10), and Kandahar (8). Both of the two healthcare facilities that were reported destroyed were located in Helmand.⁶¹⁰ As summarized to UNOCHA, 'the periodic, prolonged, or permanent closure of critical health facilities' due to the conflict and deliberate targeting of healthcare institutions affected 1.4 million Afghans 'across at least 18 provinces.'⁶¹¹

According to UNOCHA, a total of 420 incidents affecting the work of humanitarian organisations were recorded from January to June 2020. The access of aid agencies to the population was

⁵⁹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Third Quarter Report: 1 January to 30 September 2020, October 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁰⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report: Attacks on Healthcare during the Covid-19 Pandemic, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-4

⁶⁰¹ Jackson, A., For the Taliban, the Pandemic Is a Ladder, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰² New York Times (The), Where a Vaccination Campaign Faces Skepticism, War and Corruption, 23 February 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰³ Al Jazeera, Taliban launches campaign to help Afghanistan fight coronavirus, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁴ Al Jazeera, Taliban launches campaign to help Afghanistan fight coronavirus, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁵ New York Times (The), Where a Vaccination Campaign Faces Skepticism, War and Corruption, 23 February 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁶ Al Jazeera, Taliban launches campaign to help Afghanistan fight coronavirus, 6 April 2020, [url](#); Economist (The), The Taliban are joining Afghanistan's fight against covid-19, 9 May 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁷ Economist (The), The Taliban are joining Afghanistan's fight against covid-19, 9 May 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan – Afghanistan 2018-2021: 2020 Year-End Monitoring Report, January – December 2020, [url](#), pp. 10-11

⁶⁰⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan – Afghanistan 2018-2021: 2020 Year-End Monitoring Report, January – December 2020, [url](#), pp. 11, 38

⁶¹⁰ WHO, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (January 01 – December 31, 2020, 11 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶¹¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan – Afghanistan 2018-2021: 2020 Year-End Monitoring Report, January – December 2020, [url](#), p. 11

restricted due to Fighting and government and Taliban checkpoints as well as increased cases of abductions of humanitarian workers.⁶¹²

The COVID-19 pandemic was reported to cause the rise in polio cases due to difficulty for polio teams to reach distant areas and the return of Afghans from Pakistan.⁶¹³ On 30 March 2021, as reported by UNAMA, AEGs conducted an attack on the polio vaccination campaign in Jalalabad, killing 'three female vaccinators in two separate attacks.' The same day a vaccination office in Jalalabad city was damaged by IED and 'another female polio vaccination worker escaped an attack targeting her.' While the sources attributed the attacks to ISKP, no group claimed responsibility for the attacks.⁶¹⁴

The COVID-19-related restrictions limit U.S. and NATO military advisors to 'only limited, mission-essential, face-to-face advising with their Afghan counterparts.'⁶¹⁵

1.4.4 Socio-economic conditions

In July 2020, the World Bank reported on a significant decline of the Afghanistan economy in the first half of 2020 in the situation of decreasing aid, insecurity, and political uncertainty and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on industry and service sectors.⁶¹⁶ The overall decline of the Afghan economy for 2020 was estimated at 5.5 – 7.4 %.⁶¹⁷ In January 2021, SIGAR reported on the inability of the Afghan government to collect sufficient domestic revenue due to the overall economic downturn and the pandemic, while pledge assistance from donors was reported to decline.⁶¹⁸

According to the 2020 UNDP report, 75% of Afghanistan's population were living in households in which all working members were engaged in vulnerable employment, characterized by informal and insecure jobs.⁶¹⁹ In the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, opportunities for informal employment diminished, particularly affecting urban population. According to Seasonal Food Security Analysis (SFSA), 59 % of Afghan households reported on a reduction in incomes and 55 % on a loss of employment.⁶²⁰ The rise in prices for basic commodities and household debts affected food security across the country.⁶²¹ Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) reported that the cost of a 'minimum food basket'⁶²² in January 2021 was 17 % higher than the four-year average, while wages at the national level fell up to 5 %; moreover, FEWS reported that casual labour wages were at minimum levels in past four years of monitoring.⁶²³ In the current economic and social conditions,

⁶¹² UNOCHA, HAG Quarterly Report, April to June 2020, n.d., [url](#), pp. 2, 8-11

⁶¹³ New York Times (The), Where a Vaccination Campaign Faces Skepticism, War and Corruption, 23 February 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

⁶¹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, First Quarter Update: 1 January to 31 March 2021, 14 April 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁶¹⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 57

⁶¹⁶ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update – Surviving the Storm, July 2020, [url](#), pp. II, 3

⁶¹⁷ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update – Surviving the Storm, July 2020, [url](#), pp. III, 15; see also UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan – Afghanistan 2018-2021: 2020 Year-End Monitoring Report, January – December 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁶¹⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), pp. 117, 119

⁶¹⁹ UNDP, Afghanistan – Coronavirus Socio-Economic Impact Assessment, 22 July 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁶²⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 41

⁶²¹ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/634-S/2020/1182, 9 December 2020, [url](#), pp. 13-14

⁶²² The minimum food basket (MFB) comprises imported wheat flour, local rice, vegetable oil, mixed beans/pulses, and sugar. MFB is 'expected to support a six-person household in Afghanistan for one month,' see, FEWS NET: Afghanistan Food Security Outlook, February to September 2021, n.d., [url](#), p. 3.

⁶²³ FEWS NET: Afghanistan Food Security Outlook, February to September 2021, n.d., [url](#), p. 3

many households were reported to adopt negative coping mechanisms, including child labour and child marriages.⁶²⁴

The World Bank estimated that the poverty rate might rise to 61-72 % during 2020,⁶²⁵ according to UNOCHA estimations, 93 % of Afghans are expected to live on less than USD 2 per day in 2021.⁶²⁶ In 2020, 16.9 million Afghans, which is 42 % of the country's population, were defined to be at "crisis" and "emergency" levels of food insecurity.⁶²⁷ The emergency threshold for acute malnutrition was recorded in 27 out of 34 provinces. Among these, the provinces of Farah, Faryab, Jawzjan, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Paktika, Takhar, Panjsher, Kapisa, and Kunar were reported to face critical situations.⁶²⁸

According to the most recent Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS), which covers the years 2016-17, dwellings of 83 % of Afghans were constructed of non-durable materials.⁶²⁹ The survey found that 72 % of Afghanistan's urban population lived in slums or inadequate housing while an average urban household size was estimated at 7.3 persons.⁶³⁰ Based on the 2020 SFSA, UNOCHA noted that 73 % of the rural population lacked access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene services.⁶³¹ According to the 2020 Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) report, the vast majority of the Afghan population had limited access to electricity, especially in rural areas.⁶³²

1.4.5 Refugees, IDPs, returnees

Afghanistan has 'a long history of protracted international displacement,'⁶³³ caused by 'conflict, violence, and poverty'.⁶³⁴ Millions of Afghans left the country since large-scale displacement started during the civil war, which erupted in 1979⁶³⁵ with the Soviet invasion, fleeing mostly to Pakistan and Iran. While some of the refugees returned to Afghanistan in the early 1990 'following tightening of asylum conditions in receiving countries,' the emergence of the Taliban caused a new wave of displacement. The overturn of the Taliban regime in 2001 marked the 'beginning of a massive wave of returning Afghans'. For the period between 2001 and 2015, UNHCR assisted the return of 4.8 million Afghans, while many Afghans reportedly returned to the country without assistance.⁶³⁶

Afghanistan is the second largest country of origin of refugees in the world.⁶³⁷ UNHCR reported that as of the middle of 2019 the number of Afghan refugees increased 'by just under 1 %' and remained at 2.7 million, with Pakistan and Iran hosting the most refugees (1.4 million and 951 000 respectively).⁶³⁸ As of mid-2020, the figures remained the same.⁶³⁹ Based on the October 2020 data

⁶²⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 7; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan – Afghanistan 2018-2021: 2020 Year-End Monitoring Report, January – December 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁶²⁵ World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update – Surviving the Storm, July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁶²⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), pp. 10-11

⁶²⁷ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/634-S/2020/1182, 9 December 2020, [url](#), para. 64; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), pp. 22, 34, 52, 81, 135

⁶²⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2021, December 2020, [url](#), p. 23

⁶²⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), p. XXXIII

⁶³⁰ Afghanistan NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. XXXIII, 26

⁶³¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), pp. 16, 102

⁶³² Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report – Afghanistan, 2020, 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

⁶³³ UNHCR and The World Bank, Fragility and population movement in Afghanistan, 3 October 2016, [url](#), p. 1

⁶³⁴ UNHCR, Afghanistan; Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration: A synopsis, January 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁶³⁵ UNHCR, The Afghanistan Situation: Strengthening International Solidarity & Achieving Solutions, 6 July 2019, [url](#)

⁶³⁶ UNHCR and The World Bank, Fragility and population movement in Afghanistan, 3 October 2016, [url](#), p. 1

⁶³⁷ IOM, World Migration Report 2020, 27 November 2019, [url](#), p. 39

⁶³⁸ UNHCR, Mid-Year Trends 2019, 10 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁶³⁹ UNHCR, Mid-Year Trends 2020, 30 November 2020, [url](#), p. 12

of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, UNHCR reported on 780 000 Afghan refugees and 2 250 000 undocumented Afghans residing in Iran.⁶⁴⁰

A spike in returns was registered in 2016⁶⁴¹, when around one million documented and undocumented Afghans returned to the country. In 2017, the number of returns from Pakistan and Iran exceeded 610 000, with more than 450 000 undocumented returnees arriving from Iran.⁶⁴² In 2018, a total of 805 850 undocumented returnees from Pakistan and Iran were registered, with over 773 000 of them coming from Iran.⁶⁴³ In 2019, UNHCR registered a total of almost 505 000 returns, with around 485 000 undocumented Afghans returning from Iran and almost 20 000 from Pakistan.⁶⁴⁴

According to IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) data for 2012-2020, the total inflow of returning migrants and arriving IDPs to Afghanistan's 34 provinces between 2012 and 2020, as assessed on 30 June 2020, reached almost 8 642 500, comprising around 3 882 000 returnees and 4 760 500 IDPs. Herat province was reported to host the highest number of IDPs (around 901 500), 61 % of whom were displaced by the conflict and 39 % by natural hazards, while Nangarhar province accommodated the highest number of returnees (524 100).⁶⁴⁵

Internal displacement

Throughout 2020, the displacement of many Afghan civilians was caused by the war and armed clashes between the ANDSF and AGEs.⁶⁴⁶ According to UNOCHA data, 380 000 Afghans were displaced during the period of 1 January – 31 December 2020.⁶⁴⁷ Displacements took place across 32 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, with the north-eastern, northern, and southern provinces receiving the highest numbers of IDPs.⁶⁴⁸ Citing the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, AIHRC noted that war and insecurity caused the displacement of 74 087 families, with 30 715 families originating in the northern and north-eastern region, 17 020 in the south-western region, 10 329 in the central region, 9 317 in the eastern region, 6 087 in the western region, and 619 in the southern region.⁶⁴⁹

For the period between 1 January 2021 and 12 April 2021, UNOCHA reported on 92 608 Afghans who had to flee their homes due to the conflict; 'some level of forced displacement' was recorded in 27 of 34 provinces, with the eastern region, north-eastern, and southern regions receiving the highest number of IDPs.⁶⁵⁰ For instance, as reported by local authorities, clashes between ANDSF and an unnamed Non-State Armed Group (NSAG) forced thousands of people to flee their homes in several districts of Nangarhar province in February 2021.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁰ UNHCR – Iran, Refugees in Iran, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁴¹ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁴² UNHCR and IOM, Returns to Afghanistan in 2017: Joint IOM-UNHCR Summary Report, 28 February 2018, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁴³ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, January-December 2018 – 1-5 January 2019, 5 January 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁴ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, 29 December 2019 – 4 January 2020, 4 January 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁵ IOM, DTM Afghanistan, Baseline Mobility Assessment, Summary Results Round 10, Jan – June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁴⁶ AIHRC, Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2020, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Snapshot of Population Movements (January to December 2020), 23 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements – Actual displacements between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2020, 18 April 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁹ AIHRC, Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2020, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements – Actual displacements between 1 January 2021 and 12 April 2021, 18 April 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁵¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update, 1 – 7 February 2021, 7 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update, 15 – 21 February 2021, 21 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update, 22 – 28 February 2021, 28 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

According to IOM 2020 Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), almost 4.8 million IDPs have remained in host communities since 2012.⁶⁵² As reported by UNOCHA in April 2020, around 111 000 of 245 000 people, who were displaced in the western provinces in 2018-2019 mainly because of drought, were living in displacement sites, often not able to return to their homes due to conflict in their areas of origin.⁶⁵³ According to the Whole of Afghanistan REACH Initiative (WoA) Assessment conducted from July to September 2020, 87 % of 'non-recent IDPs' planned to stay in their host location in the short term, with more than 50 % having no intention to ever return to their place of origin.⁶⁵⁴

As reported by UNOCHA in December 2020, many IDPs were 'renting or squatting in insecure housing, including in informal settlements on private land on the fringes of major cities.' As revealed by the WoA Assessment, 28 % of IDPs were living in shelters that were 'either significantly damaged or destroyed.'⁶⁵⁵ 'Moderate or severe hunger' was recorded among 86 % of displaced communities in Parwan, followed by Faryab (80 %), Nimroz (74 %), and Sar-e Pul (63 %).⁶⁵⁶

UNOCHA noted on the negative coping mechanisms, such as early and/or forced marriages, child labour, and begging being practiced by vulnerable groups, including IDPs, with the situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁵⁷ In July 2020, around 35 % of displaced households reported 'loss or severely diminished access to services due to COVID-19', with 30 % of displaced households reporting 'feeling unsafe travelling to or being at health facilities due to insecurity'. Moreover 44 % of the IDPs stated they were 'unable to access healthcare due to distance and the lack of transportation options'.⁶⁵⁸

Deportations and voluntary returns

According to UNOCHA, in 2020, around 860 000 Afghans returned from Iran and 7 900 from Pakistan; around 6 000 were deported to Afghanistan from Turkey, and a small number of Afghans returned to Afghanistan from Europe.⁶⁵⁹ For the same period, IOM reported on almost 860 100 undocumented returns from Iran and around 6 700 from Pakistan.⁶⁶⁰ With the total of nearly 866 000 undocumented returns from Iran and Pakistan, that were registered by IOM in 2020, this year became the 'largest ever return year' IOM recorded for undocumented Afghan migrants,⁶⁶¹ compared to around 500 000 returns in 2019⁶⁶² and 805 000 in 2018.⁶⁶³ UNCHR reported on the return of 'only 947 refugees' from Iran to Afghanistan in 2020, relating the 'significant' decrease in returns of Afghan refugees, compared to 2019, to insecurity and instability in Afghanistan and

⁶⁵² IOM, Afghanistan – Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results, January – June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁵³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Snapshot of Population Movements - January to March 2020, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 21

⁶⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), pp. 17, 21

⁶⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 34

⁶⁵⁷ UNOCHA, COVID-19 and the Afghanistan Response HRP Revision – June 2020, 8 June 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 24

⁶⁵⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Snapshot of Population Movements (January to December 2020, 23 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁰ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, 20 – 31 December 2020, 31 December 2020, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁶¹ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, 20 – 31 December 2020, 31 December 2020, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁶² IOM reports on a total number of 496 526 as of 28 December 2019, see IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, 15 – 28 December 2019, 28 December 2019, [url](#), and a total number of 504 977 as of 4 January 2020, see IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, 29 December 2019 – 4 January 2020, 4 January 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁶³ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, 20 – 31 December 2020, 31 December 2020, [url](#), p.

COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁶⁴ Herat was the province, for which the largest number of returns from Iran was estimated (178 000), followed by Nimroz, Faryab (69 000 each), and Ghor (59 000).⁶⁶⁵

In the period between 1 January and 18 March 2021, IOM recorded a total of almost 224 100 undocumented returns from the two countries: almost 221 700 from Iran and around 2 400 from Pakistan. Among the returnees from Iran, 15 150 Afghans were reported to return voluntarily, while almost 17 100 were deported.⁶⁶⁶ IOM assisted the return of almost 85 000 undocumented Afghans in 2020 and more than 8 500 the period between 1 January and 28 February 2021.⁶⁶⁷

As reported by UNOCHA in December 2020, the high number of undocumented Afghan returnees from Iran was due to the economic decline in the region and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁶⁸ In relation to Iran, media sources mentioned reduction in employment opportunities,⁶⁶⁹ increase of living costs, and hostility of local population towards undocumented Afghans.⁶⁷⁰ On 5 May 2020, Iranian border guards were reported responsible for deaths of 45 out of 57 Afghan migrant workers trying to cross to Iran from Herat, as they allegedly forced them to return to Afghanistan by entering at gunpoint the river dividing the two countries.⁶⁷¹ As reported by RFE/RL, on 26 November 2020, Iranian lawmakers submitted a draft legislation, which would subject 'undocumented migrants entering or residing in Iran' to prison sentences up to 25 years.⁶⁷²

As noted by the UN Secretary-General in December 2020, deportations constituted 37 % of total returns from Iran in 2020; more than 9 000 Afghans were deported from Turkey.⁶⁷³

As a precautionary measure linked to the outbreak of COVID-19, UNHCR temporarily suspended the return of registered Afghan refugees from Pakistan, Iran, and other countries as of 4 March 2020.⁶⁷⁴ As of 30 April 2020, voluntary repatriation from Iran was resumed by UNHCR upon request by the Iranian Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs.⁶⁷⁵

For the information on refugees, returnees, and IDPs, please refer to the August 2020 EASO COI Report [Afghanistan - Key socio-economic indicators. Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City](#).

1.4.6 Children

With 48 % of its population being younger than 15 years, Afghanistan is one of the four countries in the world with the highest proportion of persons under the age of 15.⁶⁷⁶ UNAMA named Afghanistan 'one of the deadliest places in the world to be a child' in its yearly report for 2020.⁶⁷⁷ Save The

⁶⁶⁴ UNHCR – Iran, Refugees in Iran, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Snapshot of Population Movements (January to December 2020), 23 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁶ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, 12 – 18 March 2021, 18 March 2021, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁶⁷ IOM, 2020-21 Undocumented Afghan Return Statistics, 10 March 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), pp. 7, 21; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan – Afghanistan 2018-2021: 2020 Year-End Monitoring Report, January – December 2020, [url](#), p. 8

⁶⁶⁹ New Humanitarian (The), On the move: Conflict, refugee returns fuel Afghanistan displacement, 20 January 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Nearly 340,000 Afghans Repatriated from Iran Since January: IOM, 23 June 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁰ New Humanitarian (The), US-Iran tensions push Afghans home to conflict, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁷¹ Reuters, Exclusive: Afghan lawmakers say 45 migrants drowned after Iranian guards forced them into river, 7 May 2020, [url](#), see also HRW, Victims of Iran-Afghan Border Drowning Deserve Justice, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁷² RFE/RL, Afghan Migrants Could Face 'Shocking' Punishments in Iran Under Draft Law, 1 December 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁷³ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/634-S/2020/1182, 9 December 2020, [url](#), para. 65

⁶⁷⁴ UNHCR, Afghanistan Border Monitoring update, 21 April 2020, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁷⁵ UNHCR, Afghanistan Border Monitoring update - COVID-19 Response (31 May-6 June 2020), 9 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁷⁶ Afghanistan, NSIA, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-2017: Highlights Report, 2018, [url](#), p. 5

⁶⁷⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 30

Children listed Afghanistan as one of the ten worst conflict-affected countries to be a child, underlining that Afghanistan had the biggest figures for killed and injured children.⁶⁷⁸

According to UNAMA, children accounted for 30 % of all civilian casualties in Afghanistan in 2020: during 2020, UNAMA documented 2 619 child casualties (760 deaths and 1 859 injured), which was a 17 % decrease compared to 2019.⁶⁷⁹ With the figure of 1 195 casualties (304 killed and 891 injured), ground engagements between PGFs and AGEs constituted the leading cause for child casualties in 2020, with the indirect fire causing ‘the vast majority’ of them.⁶⁸⁰ The second and third causes for child casualties were non-suicide attacks by AGEs, which caused 517 casualties (150 child deaths and 367 injured), and explosive remnants of war, which lead to 314 casualties (84 deaths and 230 injured) among the children.⁶⁸¹ Explosive remnants of war (ERW) caused disproportional harm to children, who constituted 80 % of all civilian casualties from ERW.⁶⁸² Moreover, as noted by UNAMA and UNOCHA, children injured by ERW suffer from long-lasting impacts of the injuries due to physical disabilities and psychological trauma.⁶⁸³

AGEs were responsible for 42 % of child casualties in 2020 (1 098 casualties, including 281 deaths and 817 injured), which was a 28 % decrease compared to the year before. Among AGEs, 36 % of child casualties were attributed to the Taliban, 4 % to undetermined AGEs, and 2 % to ISKP.⁶⁸⁴ PGFs caused 37 % of child casualties (962 casualties, including 337 deaths and 625 injured), which was a 7 % decrease compared to 2019. Although there was a 12 % decrease in child casualties from airstrikes by the Afghan Air Force and international military forces when compared to 2019, airstrikes constituted the fourth leading cause of child casualties (299 casualties, including 146 deaths and 153 injured).⁶⁸⁵

Between 1 January and 31 December 2020, UNAMA documented 62 incidents that affected children’s access to education, comprised of attacks on education facilities, targeting of educational personnel, and threats against education facilities and their staff. Most of the incidents occurred in the eastern (16 incidents), north-eastern (14 incidents), and northern (10 incidents) regions. In the incidents, 30 students were killed and 53 injured.⁶⁸⁶ According to UNOCHA, four schools were burnt and 27 were damaged between January and September 2020.⁶⁸⁷ In June 2020, UN Secretary-General reported that the ANA used six schools for military purposes while one school was used by government and pro-government forces.⁶⁸⁸

Underlining that the numbers of child recruitment by parties to the armed conflict must be higher than documented, UNAMA reported on the recruitment and use of 196 boys in 2020, occurring mostly in the northern and north-eastern regions; 172 of the cases were attributed to the Taliban.⁶⁸⁹ As noted by UNAMA, the mission was continuously receiving reports on recruitment and use of children by the ANSF across the country: according to unverified reports, the children were used by ANP, ALP, and ANSF in general, as bodyguards and drivers and were engaged in combat roles and at

⁶⁷⁸ Save The Children, 2020: Gender Matters, n.d., [url](#), p. 12

⁶⁷⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 30

⁶⁸⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 31

⁶⁸¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 31-32

⁶⁸² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 16, 32

⁶⁸³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 32, 77-78; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan – Afghanistan 2018-2021: 2020 Year-End Monitoring Report, January – December 2020, [url](#), p. 7

⁶⁸⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 30-31

⁶⁸⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 31

⁶⁸⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 38

⁶⁸⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan – Afghanistan 2018-2021: 2020 Year-End Monitoring Report, January – December 2020, [url](#), p. 11

⁶⁸⁸ UN Security Council, Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/845-S/2020/525, 9 June 2020, [url](#), para. 23

⁶⁸⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 33-34

checkpoints; cases of sexual exploitation, including *bacha bazi*, were also reported.⁶⁹⁰ Noting on ‘the notable progress’ undertaken by the Afghan MoI to stop and prevent child recruitment through the Child Protection Units established in the ANP recruitment centres, which prevented 187 underage boys ‘from enlisting the ranks’ of the ANP in 2020,⁶⁹¹ UNAMA underlined that the use of children ‘for service and sexual purposes’ by ANP and, to a lesser extent, ‘for combat functions’ by Afghan National Army-Territorial Force and ALP remained of ‘grave concern’.⁶⁹²

As revealed from the WoA Assessment, COVID-19 pandemic increased risks for child recruitment and use of children by armed groups, child marriage, and child labour.⁶⁹³ In its yearly report, UNAMA similarly noticed that with the rise of unemployment and poverty, many children became ‘forced to seek employment in order to support their families, and in doing so attempt to join the ranks of parties to the conflict.’⁶⁹⁴

In 2020, UNAMA verified 19 incidents of abduction of children, which involved 55 children: 18 of the incidents were attributed to the Taliban and one to a pro-government armed group.⁶⁹⁵

In 2020, UNAMA-documented cases of rape and sexual violence were reported to affect nine boys and five girls and were attributed to the ANSF, including ANP (three cases), ALP, ANA, Afghan National Army-Territorial Force, and a pro-government armed group (one case each), the Taliban (two cases), and civilians (one case). However, as underlined by UNAMA, the reporting on and verification of incidents related to sexual violence, including the practice of *bacha bazi*, remained difficult due to social stigmatization of the victims.⁶⁹⁶

The Child Rights Protection Law was enacted by President Ghani in March 2019. Defining ‘a child as a person who has not “completed” the age of 18’, the law aims to end recruitment and use of children as well as the practice of *bacha bazi*, which is in line with the 2018 revised Penal Code.⁶⁹⁷ In March 2020, the AAN researcher Rohullah Soroush noted that the ratification of the legislation to protect the rights of children by the *Wolesi Jirga* (Lower House of Parliament) remained blocked due to a disagreement over ‘the definition of a child’ as ‘a small group of MPs, mostly religious scholars and/or with a jihadi background’ saw ‘the definition of a child as under-18’ as a contravention to the *sharia*.⁶⁹⁸ UNAMA noted in its 2020 report that the ‘attempts to pass the Child Act through Parliament’ remained unsuccessful ‘due to disagreement on the definition of a child in the text as a person who has not completed the age of 18.’⁶⁹⁹

1.5 Geographical overview

1.5.1 Urban-rural divide

According to the Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA), around 71 % of the population (23.4 million) is estimated to live in rural areas and 24.4 % (8 million) in urban areas in 2020-2021; 4.6 % (1.5 million) of the population is officially estimated to pursue a nomadic way of

⁶⁹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, July 2020, [url](#), p. 20; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 34

⁶⁹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 34

⁶⁹² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 33

⁶⁹³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2021, December 2020, [url](#), p. 35

⁶⁹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 34

⁶⁹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 32

⁶⁹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 35

⁶⁹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2019, February 2020, [url](#), p. 23

⁶⁹⁸ Soroush, R., Child Rights Protection Law in Afghanistan: Can the parliamentary chaos be resolved, AAN, 18 March 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 34

life.⁷⁰⁰ According to NSIA, urban areas display a higher population growth because of rural-urban migration.⁷⁰¹

Afghanistan's history is characterised by a structural urban-rural divide.⁷⁰² In 2019, media sources described the Afghan rural population as living 'in absolute or near-absolute poverty'⁷⁰³ and facing realities of war as 'a part of daily life'⁷⁰⁴ in contrast with urban dwellers, who have more opportunities to gain income and include a class of urban elites and persons engaged in 'family politics'.⁷⁰⁵ According to Foreign Policy (FP), the urban-rural divide, the lack of services and jobs in rural parts of the country, and the lack of trust in the government were behind the decision of many Afghans to join the Taliban.⁷⁰⁶

In 2015, the Taliban set as an objective to 'capture and hold towns and provincial capitals.'⁷⁰⁷ During 2018, as reported by the UN Secretary-General, the Taliban temporarily captured 21 district administrative centres, which was 'the second highest level since the security transition to the Afghan forces at the end of 2014.'⁷⁰⁸ In the end of August and beginning of September 2019, the Taliban conducted large-scale offensives against provincial capitals of Kunduz, Baghlan, and Farah.⁷⁰⁹

As noted by USDOD in June 2020, the Taliban resumed its attacks after the seven-day reduction in violence (RIV), preceding the U.S.-Taliban Agreement signed on 29 February 2020. The Taliban fighters were reported to target primarily 'ANDSF and GIRA checkpoints and convoys in rural areas,' refraining from conducting high-profile attacks in urban population centres as well as from targeting facilities of the U.S. and the coalition.⁷¹⁰ In December 2020, UN Secretary-General reported on attacks conducted by the Taliban on 'several district administrative centres across the country' in 2020, noting that the group 'increased pressure on provincial capitals such as Kunduz, Lashkar Gah and Tirin Kot.'⁷¹¹

In its report for 2020, UNAMA noted on a decrease in the number of Taliban-attributed suicide attacks on urban settlements. Suicide and non-suicide IEDs were reported to cause numerous civilian casualties particularly in provincial capitals.⁷¹² As reported by AP in February 2021, vehicle-borne IEDs, detonated by remote control or timer, constituted most bomb attacks in Kabul city in 'recent months.'⁷¹³

1.5.2 Regional differences

While the fighting decreased at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 'in line with seasonal trends during the winter months,' the provinces of Kandahar, Helmand, Nangahar, and Balkh were

⁷⁰⁰ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. iii

⁷⁰¹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2018-19, July 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁷⁰² Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, January 2012, [url](#), pp. 7-8

⁷⁰³ Asey, T., The Price of Inequality: The Dangerous Rural-Urban Divide in Afghanistan, Global Security Review, updated 9 June 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁴ Feroz, E., Let's face the truth, rural Afghanistan has been lost, TRT World, 16 April 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁵ Asey, T., The Price of Inequality: The Dangerous Rural-Urban Divide in Afghanistan, Global Security Review, updated 9 June 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁶ FP, Feeling Abandoned by Kabul Many Rural Afghans Flock to Join the Taliban, 24 September 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁷ BBC News, Why are the Taliban resurgent in Afghanistan?, 5 January 2016, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁸ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/73/777-S/2019/193, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁰⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p.35

⁷¹⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 17

⁷¹¹ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/634-S/2020/1182, 9 December 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁷¹² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 42-44

⁷¹³ AP, Officials: Roadside bombs in Afghanistan kill 3, wound 20, 21 February 2021, [url](#)

the most active conflict areas between November 2019 and February 2020.⁷¹⁴ In March 2020, acceleration of violence was reported particularly due to Taliban attacks on ANSF and consequent increase in civilian casualties, predominantly in the northern and north-eastern regions.⁷¹⁵ Between February and May 2020, the highest number of security incidents was recorded in the southern region, followed by eastern and northern regions. As reported by UN Secretary-General in June 2020, based on UNAMA data, the incidents in these three regions accounted for 59 % of all incidents recorded in Afghanistan in that period. Between March and June 2020, 'the highest amount of conflict activity' was reported in the provinces of Kandahar, Helmand, Wardak, and Balkh.⁷¹⁶

Reporting on the situation in Wardak, Kunduz, and Nangarhar provinces after the signing of the Doha Agreement 29 February 2020, AAN researcher Andrew Quilty noted that NDS raids in the province of Maidan Wardak and Nangarhar 'ceased almost entirely around the time the Doha agreement was signed.' However, the civilians 'living close to frontlines' in Maidan Wardak, and particularly those residing close to main roads, GoA-held district centres, and the capital Maidan Shahr, reported on the increased incidents of the use of fire and explosive munitions by the government forces.⁷¹⁷

In June 2020, as reported by Tolonews, the ANSF was fighting the Taliban in Takhar, Jawzjan, Paktya, Helmand, Khost, Ghor, Kunduz, Badghis, Kandahar, Samangan, Faryab, Ghazni, Logar, Herat, and Badakhshan provinces, as reported by Afghan officials.⁷¹⁸ In its midyear report, UNAMA noted that the conflict caused the biggest number of civilian casualties in Balkh and Kabul provinces, resulting in 344 and 338 civilian casualties respectively. Other provinces with large numbers of civilian casualties reported were Nangarhar (281), Faryab (233), and Kunduz (205 civilian casualties). Moreover, over 50 % of civilian casualties caused by airstrikes of Afghan Air Forces between January and June 2020 occurred in Kunduz and Balkh provinces.⁷¹⁹

As reported by UNAMA in October 2020, despite 'the national trend of an overall reduction in civilian casualties,' the provinces of Balkh, Samangan, Jawzjan, Badakhshan, Ghor, Kapisa, Logar, Khost, and Bamyan saw an increase in civilian casualties in the period between 1 January 2020 and 30 September 2020, when compared to the figures of the same period in 2019. Noticeable, civilian casualties in Balkh, Samangan, and Badakhshan were reported to more than double.⁷²⁰ In December 2020, the UN Secretary-General reported that the highest number of security incidents occurred in the southern region, followed by the northern and eastern regions. While the total number of incidents in these regions accounted for 62 % of all security incidents, the highest numbers of security incidents were recorded in Kandahar, Helmand, Nangarhar, and Balkh.⁷²¹ As reported by SIGAR, heavy clashes between U.S., Afghan, and Taliban forces in Helmand in October 2020 and Kandahar in the last months of 2020 forced 'thousands of families' to leave their homes.⁷²²

⁷¹⁴ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/753-S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁷¹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, First Quarter Report: 1 January- 31 March 2020, June 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁷¹⁶ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/897-S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁷¹⁷ Quilty, A., Taleban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan conflict has changed since the Doha agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#). The report is based on 53 interviews conducted in Maidan Wardak, Kunduz, and Nangarhar between June and August 2020.

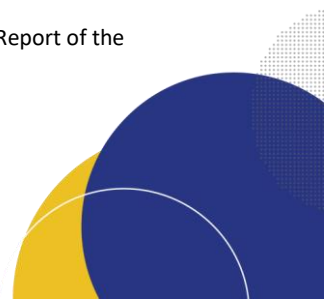
⁷¹⁸ Tolonews, ANDSF Fighting Taliban in 15 Provinces Amid Peace Efforts, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

⁷¹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 5, 16

⁷²⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Third Quarter Report: 1 January to 30 September 2020, October 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁷²¹ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/634-S/2020/1182, 9 December 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁷²² SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 51



Reporting on civilian casualties, UNAMA noted that ‘spikes’ in civilian casualties caused by ground engagements were recorded during the Taliban offensives against Kunduz city in May 2020 and Lashkargah city in October 2020. Furthermore, 48 % of civilian casualties from Taliban pressure-plate IEDs was recorded in the southern region, where 243 civilians were killed and 173 injured in 116 documented incidents of this type. Most of these incidents were recorded in Kandahar and Helmand provinces.⁷²³

In January 2021, clashes between ANSF and an NSAG were reported to continue in the eastern region in Nangarhar, Kunar, Laghman, and Nuristan provinces;⁷²⁴ in February, the fighting intensified particularly in Nangarhar districts.⁷²⁵ In January and February 2021, UNOCHA reported on ongoing fighting between ANSF and an NSAG in Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, and Zabul provinces.ⁱ In January 2021, fighting, military operations, IED attacks, and checkpoints were reported in Badghis, Herat, Farah, and Ghor,⁷²⁶ with the situation remaining unstable in these provinces in February 2021.⁷²⁷ In both months, fighting was reported in Badakhshan, Baghlan, Kunduz, and Takhar provinces;⁷²⁸ clashes between ANSF and a NSAG and IED attacks were reported in the provinces of Kabul, Logar, Maidan Wardak, Khost, Ghazni, Paktika, Paktya,⁷²⁹ and Kapisa;⁷³⁰ the fighting was reported to continue also in Balkh, Faryab, Sar-e Pul, Jawzjan, and Samangan provinces.⁷³¹

As reported by the UN Secretary-General in January 2021, ISKP was facing ‘challenges in its ability to seize and hold significant territory’ in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, where it claimed responsibility for several high-profile attacks.⁷³² In its 2020 report, UNAMA noted that mass-casualty incidents and/or suicide attacks and mass shootings in the cities of Kabul and Jalalabad and a suicide attack in Kuz Kunar district of Nangarhar province brought more than 95 % of civilian casualties attributed to ISKP.⁷³³

In June 2020, a research study on ISKP’s ‘Kabul cell’ by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) revealed that ISKP had cells in Afghanistan’s urban centres and recruited men and women from middle-class families, with many university students of non-Pashtun origin, predominantly from Kabul City and the surrounding urban centres of Parwan, Kapisa, and Panjsher provinces. According to the research, except of a small number of ‘original Kabulis’ and Uzbeks originated from the provinces of Jawzjan, Takhar, and Faryab, the members of ISKP’s Kabul cell comprise young people from the areas of *muqawamat* (anti-Taliban resistance), who have either settled in Kabul or visit it regularly.⁷³⁴

⁷²³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 43, 49

⁷²⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 – 24 January 2021), 27 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁷²⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (15 – 21 February 2021), 24 February 2021, p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁷²⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 – 31 January 2021), 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁷²⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (1 – 7 February 2021), 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁷²⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 – 31 January 2021), 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁷²⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update, (25 – 31 January 2021), 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁷³⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update, (18 – 24 January 2021), 27 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update, (18 – 24 January 2021), 27 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁷³¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update, 18 – 24 January 2021, n.d., [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (15 – 21 February 2021), 24 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update, 22 – 28 February 2021, 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁷³² UN Security Council, Twelfth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States, S/2021/98, 29 January 2021, [url](#), p. 7

⁷³³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 43

⁷³⁴ Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, Peaceworks No 62, 1 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 2, 11-12. The research is based on 65 interviews with current and former ISKP members, their families, and friends, conducted in Kabul city, the surrounding provinces, and the provinces of Nangahar and Kunar in November 2019.

In June 2020, USDOD reported that the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan remains ‘a sanctuary for various groups,’ including ISKP, Al Qaeda Core (AQ), Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LeT), and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).⁷³⁵ In July 2020, local Afghan officials reported on a presence of al-Qa’ida and other foreign insurgents in the areas stretching from Disho district in Helmand province to Herat province.⁷³⁶

1.5.3 Government versus Taliban control

As noted by the AAN co-Director Kate Clark in May 2017, sources that assess the Taliban’s territorial control in Afghanistan tend to disagree over figures and over the definition of the word ‘control’.⁷³⁷ Moreover, as pointed out by ANN expert Thomas Ruttig, there are different counts of the number of districts.⁷³⁸

After the February RIV period, the Taliban continued attacking ANDSF checkpoints and convoys but avoided attacks against provincial capitals and coalition forces.⁷³⁹ In June 2020, the UN Secretary-General reported that neither PGFs nor AGEs ‘achieved any significant territorial gains’ between March and June 2020. In March 2020, the Taliban recaptured Yamgan district, Badakhshan province, while in April the ANDSF overtook the districts of Khamyab and Qarqin⁷⁴⁰ in Jowzjan province, held by the Taliban for around two years.⁷⁴¹ In June 2020, USDOD reported that the Afghan government maintained its control in ‘Kabul, provincial capitals, major population centers, most district centers, and most portions of major ground lines of communications (GLOCs)’, while the Taliban threatened district centres and contested ‘several portions of main GLOCs’.⁷⁴² According to the Afghan authorities, ‘the Taliban carried out 422 attacks in 32 provinces’ during the third week of June, killing almost 300 Afghan security personnel, making the week the ‘deadliest’ in the course of the conflict.⁷⁴³

As reported by Security-General in December 2020, armed clashes became more frequent from the middle of July to the end of October 2020.⁷⁴⁴ In August 2020, the Taliban released photographs depicting its fighters parading in eastern provinces of Logar, Laghman, and Ghazni—the provinces in which the Taliban was reported to ‘control or heavily contest territory’—to celebrate the release of 400 prisoners by the Afghan government.⁷⁴⁵ In October 2020, the Taliban conducted an offensive on Lashkargah, the capital of Helmand,⁷⁴⁶ followed by a counter offensive by the ANSF.⁷⁴⁷ Since October 2020, the fighting between ANSF and the Taliban was reported in Kandahar Province. As reported by SIGAR, almost 200 checkpoints of the ANA’s 205th Corps in Kandahar province were abandoned to the Taliban during December 2020, leaving government weapons and ammunition to the Taliban.⁷⁴⁸ In March 2021, the Taliban reported to have captured Charkh district of Logar province, 130

⁷³⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 17

⁷³⁶ Tolonews, Al Qaeda Training Taliban in Helmand: Local Officials, 30 July 2020, [url](#)

⁷³⁷ Clark, K., Looking at the ‘Nicholson plan’: A bid to tilt the Afghan war in the government’s favour, AAN, 24 May 2017, [url](#)

⁷³⁸ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

⁷³⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 17

⁷⁴⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 18

⁷⁴¹ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/897-S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁴² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 18

⁷⁴³ France 24, Taliban killed 291 Afghan security personnel in past week: govt, 23 June 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁴ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/634-S/2020/1182, 9 December 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁴⁵ LWJ, Taliban parades fighters as 400 more prisoners are freed, 12 August 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁶ BBC News, Afghan-Taliban conflict: Fears grow for families trapped in Helmand, 15 October 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁷ Reuters, Afghan forces launch counter assault after Taliban offensive overshadows talks, 13 October 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 67

kilometres south of Kabul city, while the Afghan MoD stated the district was still controlled by ANSF.⁷⁴⁹

A survey conducted by Pajhwok Afghan News from November 2020 until February 2021, designated 46 % of Afghanistan's territory as controlled by the Afghan government and 52 % as controlled by the Taliban control. Around 3 % of the territory, as found out by the survey, was controlled by no side.⁷⁵⁰

As of 4 April 2021, an assessment of the LWJ mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, considered 133 districts of Afghanistan (33 %) to be under the control of GoA or have undetermined status, 187 districts (47 %) to be contested, 75 districts (19 %) to be held by the Taliban; three districts (1 %) were assessed as 'unconfirmable Taliban claim of control'. According to the population figures, 15.2 million people were living in areas controlled by GoA or having undetermined status, 13.2 million in contested areas, 4.5 million in the Taliban-controlled areas, and 92 400 in the districts of unconfirmable Taliban claim of control. While as of 25 May 2021, 97 districts (24 %) to be under the control of GoA or have undetermined status, 213 districts (54 %) to be contested, 88 districts (22 %) to be held by the Taliban. According to the population figures, 11.9 million people were living in areas controlled by GoA or having undetermined status, 15.9 million in contested areas, 5.1 million in the Taliban-controlled areas.⁷⁵¹

1.6 Mobility

In December 2020, UNOCHA noted that armed conflict, lack of means of transportation, poor road conditions, and natural hazards continue to affect the Afghan population.⁷⁵²

The most important highway in Afghanistan is National Highway (NH) 1.⁷⁵³ Also referred to as the 'Ring Road',⁷⁵⁴ NH 1 connects Kabul city to border areas with Iran, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan and at least seven Afghan provinces,⁷⁵⁵ including Afghanistan's main urban centres: Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, and Kandahar.⁷⁵⁶ Between 2018 and 2020, sections of NH 1 were reported to be destroyed⁷⁵⁷, blocked⁷⁵⁸, and contaminated with Taliban-planted IEDs⁷⁵⁹ during the Taliban offensives and clashes between AEGs and ANSF. The instances of the damage of NH 1 parts in 2020 include, but are not limited to, the following: as of January 2020, the Kabul-Kandahar highway was reported to be severely damaged in parts of Zabul province;⁷⁶⁰ in October 2020, the Afghan MoD reported that the

⁷⁴⁹ Ariana News, Taliban captures Charkh district in Logar province, 22 March 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#). For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephone interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country.

⁷⁵¹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

⁷⁵² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 17

⁷⁵³ Garda World, Afghanistan: Striking drivers blocking Kabul-Kandahar highway in Wardak Province as of Feb. 17, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁴ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁵ Garda World, Afghanistan: Striking drivers blocking Kabul-Kandahar highway in Wardak Province as of Feb. 17, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁶ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁷ UN News, 'No safe way' into battle-scarred Afghan city of Ghazni to deliver aid as traumatized children search for parents, 17 August 2018, [url](#); Arab News, Arab forces, Taliban battle for control of highway in Ghazni province, 6 October 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁸ Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁹ UN News, 'No safe way' into battle-scarred Afghan city of Ghazni to deliver aid as traumatized children search for parents, 17 August 2018, [url](#); Ariana News, Kabul – Kandahar highway in need for grave reconstruction, 23 January 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁰ Ariana News, Kabul – Kandahar highway in need for grave reconstruction, 23 January 2020, [url](#)

Taliban damaged the largest part of the road in Andlan area of Shah Wali Kot district, which is a part of the Kandahar-Uruzgan highway and the main road for travelling between the provinces;⁷⁶¹ in November 2020, the local officials in Ghazni reported that the Taliban destroyed 600 meters of the Ghazni-Paktika highway in Khan-e Baba area of Andar district.⁷⁶² In October 2020, an increased presence of the Taliban on the Kabul-Ghazni highway reportedly forced drivers to divert the route to reach southern provinces.⁷⁶³

As stated by AAN researcher Andrew Quilty, 'greater Taliban control of major roads' has been 'a post-Doha Taleban trend countrywide.' The group was reported to gain greater control of the roads of Maidan Wardak.⁷⁶⁴ In August 2020, local officials reported on the increased presence of the Taliban in the area of the Herat-Badghis highway, which made the road dangerous for commuters and travellers;⁷⁶⁵ in September 2020, according to local officials, the highway was cleared of the Taliban.⁷⁶⁶

In January 2021, UNOCHA noted that civilian and humanitarian movements on the roads connecting provincial capitals of Balkh, Faryab, Sar-e Pul, Jawzjan, and Samangan to district centres of these provinces were 'risky' due to the intensified fighting and insecurity;⁷⁶⁷ in the end of February 2021, the situation remained reportedly unchanged. Similarly, main highways connecting Kabul to Jalalabad, Logar, and Ghazni were reported insecure for civil movements as of the end of February 2021.⁷⁶⁸ According to UNOCHA, in February 2021, roads connecting Herat to Saghar district in Ghor province and Chaghcharan, the provincial capital of Ghor, were closed to civilian and commercial use due to ongoing fighting.⁷⁶⁹

In the period between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021, the incidents affecting mobility comprised clashes between PGFs and AGEs,⁷⁷⁰ checkpoints,⁷⁷¹ abductions, including abductions of children,⁷⁷² and killings.⁷⁷³ IEDs planted on roads and highways were reported to cause casualties among civilians,⁷⁷⁴ military,⁷⁷⁵ and police.⁷⁷⁶ According to UNAMA, suicide and vehicle-borne IEDs, the use of which 'seemingly aimed at military targets' also harmed civilians as they were used on public roads.⁷⁷⁷

According to USDOS, drivers—including taxi, truck, and bus drivers—reported on checkpoints operated by security forces and insurgent groups, who extorted money and goods from travellers.⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁶¹ Khaama Press, Taliban Damages Khandahar-Uruzgan Highway: MoD, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶² Khaama Press, Taliban Destroys 600 Meters of Ghazni Highway, 9 November 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶³ Tolonews, Drivers Divert Route Over Insecurity in Kabul-Ghazni Highway, 24 October 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁴ Quilty, A., Taleban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan conflict has changed since the Doha agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁵ Tolonews, Taliban Control Herat-Badghis Highway: Locals, 19 August 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁶ Tolonews, Herat-Badghis Highway Cleared of Taliban, 5 September 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 – 24 January 2021), 27 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁷⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁷⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (15 – 21 February 2021), 24 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update, (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁷⁷⁰ AA, Taliban, Afghan forces clash in Balkh province, 18 March 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁷¹ Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Drivers Divert Route Over Insecurity in Kabul-Ghazni Highway, 24 October 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁷² Afghanistan Times, Danesh Calls for Security Along Daikundi-Uruzgan Road, 22 June 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 32, 58

⁷⁷³ Salaam Times, Taliban continue extortion, killing of travellers on highways, 6 August 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁴ Tolonews, Nine Civilians Killed in Kandahar Roadside Mine Blast, 3 June 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, 6 Civilians Killed by Paktika Roadside Bomb, 20 April 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Six Civilians Killed in Mine Blast in Jawzjan, 24 June 2020, [url](#); AP, Officials: Roadside bombs in Afghanistan kill 3, wound 20, 21 February 2021, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 50

⁷⁷⁵ Garda World, Afghanistan: Multiple IED attacks in Khost and Daikundi provinces April 21, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁶ Tolonews, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 45

⁷⁷⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 - Afghanistan, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 23

As reported by Tolonews in January 2020, cases of extortion at checkpoints established by ‘Taliban insurgents as well as government forces’ were found on the Kandahar-Kabul, Kandahar-Herat, and Kabul-Torkham Highways.⁷⁷⁹ In 2020, instances of extortion at checkpoints established by the Taliban were reported, for instance, in the districts of Baghlan,⁷⁸⁰ Zabul, Ghazni, Nimroz, and Farah provinces⁷⁸¹ and on the Baghlan-Balkh⁷⁸² and the Kunduz-Takhar⁷⁸³ highways; on Kabul-Baghlan-Kunduz highway, the Taliban was reported to ‘tax every vehicle.’⁷⁸⁴

Afghanistan has four international airports. Kabul Hamid Karzai International Airport (KBL), previously called Khwaja Rawash Airport, is located southeast of Kabul in the municipality of Khwaja Rawash.⁷⁸⁵ Kandahar Airport, named Ahmad Shah Baba International Airport and serving as the country’s second main airport,⁷⁸⁶ is situated 17 kilometres south-east of Kandahar city. Herat International Airport (HEA) is situated 19 kilometres south of Herat city. Mazar-e Sharif International Airport (MZR), named Mawlana Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi International Airport, is located 8 kilometres east of Mazar-e-Sharif.⁷⁸⁷ As reported by the Swedish Migration Agency in February 2021, international flights were operated to and from Kabul, Kandahar, and Mazar-e Sharif airports.⁷⁸⁸

In 2019, UNOCHA reported that such provinces as Baghlan, Kunar, Logar, Maidan Wardak, Nuristan, Panjshir, Samangan, and Sar-e Pul had ‘no functioning airstrips.’⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁷⁹ Tolonews, Drivers Outraged Over Extortion on Highways, 17 January 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁰ Salaam Times, Taliban continue extortion, killing of travellers on highways, 6 August 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁸¹ Salaam Times, Truck drivers call Taliban ‘looters’ as group continues extortion on highways, 24 January 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁸² Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁸³ Salaam Times, Taliban continue extortion, killing of travellers on highways, 6 August 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁴ Quilty, A., Taleban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan conflict has changed since the Doha agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁵ Kabul International Airport, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁸⁶ Ahmad Shah Baba International Airport, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁸⁷ Afghanistan, ACAA, AIRAC AIP Amendment, 28 January 2021, [url](#), pp. 65, 84, 94

⁷⁸⁸ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Inrikesflyg, Afghanistan, 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 9

⁷⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 11

2. Regional description of the security situation in Afghanistan

2.1 Kabul City

2.1.1 General description of the city

Kabul City is the capital of Afghanistan and of Kabul province, of which it is a separate district alongside 14 others.⁷⁹⁰ Surrounded by mountains, the city is located at 1 800 metres above sea level.⁷⁹¹ Kabul City consists of 22 urban districts,⁷⁹² which coincide with Kabul's 22 Police Districts (PDs).⁷⁹³

Kabul City is laid out as a circle consisting of three concentric rings: the first one includes the neighbourhoods of Shahr-e Kohna, the old city, Shahr-e Naw, the new city, as well as Shash Darak and Wazir Akbar Khan, where many foreign embassies, international organisations and offices are located. The second ring consists of neighbourhoods developed in the 1950s-1980s to host the growing urban population, like Taimani, Qala-e Fatullah, Kart-e Se, Kart-e Chahar, Kart-e Naw and the *microrations* (Soviet-style residential districts). The outer, growing ring of the city expanded rapidly after 2001, mainly housing Afghans who have migrated to the capital since then and some high-profile residential compounds.⁷⁹⁴

According to estimates for 2019-20 by Afghanistan's NSIA, Kabul City has a population of 4 273 156.⁷⁹⁵ However, exact population figures are disputed and estimates range from 3.5 million up to a possible 6.5 million inhabitants in 2020,⁷⁹⁶ with reportedly around two million new residents in the past 10 years.⁷⁹⁷ Kabul is by far Afghanistan's most populous and influential city, characterised by an unprecedented demographic and urban growth.⁷⁹⁸ Massive returnee populations, IDPs and economic migrants have spurred this rapid growth, with rural Afghans now outnumbering Kabuli

⁷⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Kabul Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial Reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 14

⁷⁹¹ REACH, Area Based Community Profile: Kabul, Afghanistan, December 2017, [url](#), p. 3

⁷⁹² Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 10; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-27

⁷⁹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Informal Settlements, 4 January 2016, [url](#), p. 1; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁹⁴ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁹⁵ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 4-5

⁷⁹⁶ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 9-10; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; IGC, Urbanisation in Fragile Societies: Thinking about Kabul, 13 February 2020, [url](#); City Mayors Statistics, The World's Largest Cities and Urban Areas in 2020, n.d., [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Kabul Residents, Visitors Recall Capital's Golden Era before Conflict, 21 December 2020, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Kabul's Unquenchable Thirst: Crisis Looms in Afghan Capital as Groundwater Reserves Run Dry, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁷ Washington Post (The), A Photo Tour of Kabul Shows How 20 Years of U.S. Military Presence Reshaped Afghanistan's Capital, 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁸ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; IGC, Urbanisation in Fragile Societies: Thinking about Kabul, 13 February 2020, [url](#); Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Kabul Residents, Visitors Recall Capital's Golden Era before Conflict, 21 December 2020, [url](#); Washington Post (The), A Photo Tour of Kabul Shows How 20 Years of U.S. Military Presence Reshaped Afghanistan's Capital, 25 March 2021, [url](#)

natives,⁷⁹⁹ but the city's infrastructure has not followed at the same pace.⁸⁰⁰ According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, the Afghan capital's 'rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation has created new economic and security challenges inside the city', with the residual urban social fabric that helped to preserve a certain social order, guaranteeing some degrees of security, now disappearing fast.⁸⁰¹ As described by several sources, the main problems afflicting the Afghan capital in recent years have been inadequate housing and sanitation,⁸⁰² overstretched basic services and resources,⁸⁰³ unemployment,⁸⁰⁴ land grabbing,⁸⁰⁵ poverty,⁸⁰⁶ traffic and limited accessibility,⁸⁰⁷ drought,⁸⁰⁸ severe air pollution⁸⁰⁹ and criminality.⁸¹⁰

Kabul is an ethnically diverse city, with communities from almost all Afghan ethnicities. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluch, people belonging to the religious minority group of Sikhs and Hindus, all reside there, with no group clearly dominating.⁸¹¹ According to Foschini, central Kabul is 'cosmopolitan' and more mixed than in the past, with the constant movement of residents having a disruptive effect on social networks.⁸¹² Districts in Kabul's outskirts are ethnically more homogenous.⁸¹³ As people tend to move to areas where they already have family or into particular districts as part of a larger group with the same ethnicity, different city neighbourhoods have become associated with different ethnic groups.⁸¹⁴ In these densely populated areas, a sort of village society has emerged, whose dwellers know each other and have more direct connections with their province of origin than with central Kabul.⁸¹⁵

⁷⁹⁹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Kabul Residents, Visitors Recall Capital's Golden Era before Conflict, 21 December 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁰ Ruttig, T., Alltag in Kabul. Referat von Thomas Ruttig (AAN) am 12. April 2017, 20 June 2017, [url](#), pp. 6-7; NRC and ACAPS, Displacement and Access in Afghanistan: Scenarios, June 2019, [url](#), p. 11; Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁰¹ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁰² Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Al Jazeera, Life in the City: Tackling Kabul's Urban Challenges, 11 July 2019, [url](#); Finland, FIS, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 13-14; Telegraph (The), Kabul's Unquenchable Thirst: Crisis Looms in Afghan Capital as Groundwater Reserves Run Dry, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁰³ Al Jazeera, Life in the City: Tackling Kabul's Urban Challenges, 11 July 2019, [url](#); Finland, FIS, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 10

⁸⁰⁴ Finland, FIS, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 4, 9

⁸⁰⁵ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Finland, FIS, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 13

⁸⁰⁶ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Finland, FIS, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 4, 8, 9

⁸⁰⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Al Jazeera, Life in the City: Tackling Kabul's Urban Challenges, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁸ Telegraph (The), Kabul's Unquenchable Thirst: Crisis Looms in Afghan Capital as Groundwater Reserves Run Dry, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁹ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; DW, Kabul - Where Breathing Can Kill You, 6 December 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Air Pollution Claimed almost 5,000 Lives in Afghanistan Last Year, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸¹⁰ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; New York Times (The), They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime?, 8 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸¹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Kabul Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#); Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 6; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-27

⁸¹² Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁸¹³ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 6, 58

⁸¹⁴ APPRO, Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?, October 2012, [url](#), p. 8; IGC, Urbanisation in Fragile Societies: Thinking about Kabul, 13 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸¹⁵ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), p. 7; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 3

Kabul City hosts Hamid Karzai Airport, served by international and domestic scheduled passenger flights.⁸¹⁶ Full responsibility of Afghanistan's four international airports (including the airport in Kabul City) will be handed over from NATO's Resolute Support (RS) mission to the Afghan Civil Aviation Authority (ACAA), as announced in August 2020. The precise timing remains under review, but the handover will take place in 2021, according to SIGAR reporting.⁸¹⁷

2.1.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul City

Although the Afghan capital is under government control,⁸¹⁸ Kabul remains a target for AGEs who continue to carry out attacks in the city.⁸¹⁹

Like in the second half of 2019, the Taliban strategy in 2020 was described as a mixture of 'fight and talk', reportedly seeking to gain leverage in the ongoing peace talks with the Afghan government through gains on the battlefield - including attacks against civilian targets (civilians with specific profiles have been targeted - see further) in large urban areas.⁸²⁰ An increase in Taliban attacks has been reported in Kabul City since the last quarter of 2020.⁸²¹ According to the Afghanistan Study Group Final Report, published by USIP in February 2021, 'from late 2020, the steady rhythm of terror attacks in Kabul and across the country suggests a disinclination or inability on the group's part to restrain the use of terror, either by its own members or by others'.⁸²²

Several sources reported on a sharp rise in the use of magnetic bombs attached to vehicles (often called 'sticky bombs') by the Taliban in Kabul. This tactic is described as a quick, cheap, simple and relatively unpredictable way for the Taliban to demonstrate their reach in the capital while avoiding mass civilian casualties.⁸²³ A government intelligence official described to the New York Times how these magnetic bombs, assembled with plastic high explosives and powerful magnets, are smuggled into the capital by the militants using an underground courier system called *belti*. The devices can be detonated remotely and are attached as close as possible to a vehicle's fuel tank to ensure a strong explosion. According to a retired Afghan general, these kinds of attacks leave the impression that the Taliban can operate in the Afghan capital with 'near impunity', adding that 'Kabul is an open city - these Taliban live here and make their bombs here'.⁸²⁴ An Afghan security official referred to a

⁸¹⁶ CAPA - Centre for Aviation, Kabul Hamid Karzai International Airport, n.d., [url](#)

⁸¹⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#), p. 157; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 130

⁸¹⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 2, 18; USIP, Afghanistan Study Group Final Report, February 2021, [url](#), p. 37; Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#); USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 33

⁸¹⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 16; Ruttig, T., First Breakthrough Toward Peace? A Look at the Seven Day 'Reduction of Violence', AAN, 17 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan - Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 36-37, 84-85, 94

⁸²⁰ Reuters, Fight and Talk: Facing Negotiations, Taliban almost Took Key Afghan City, 14 September 2020, [url](#);

RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Security Forces Hit by Surge of Taliban Suicide Car Bombings, 9 December 2021, [url](#)

⁸²¹ CSIS, Escaping the Graveyard of Empires? U.S. Options in Afghanistan, 26 January 2021, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 50

⁸²² USIP, Afghanistan Study Group Final Report, February 2021, [url](#), p. 39

⁸²³ New York Times (The), With Delay in Afghan Peace Talks, a Creeping Sense of 'Siege' Around Kabul, 23 August 2020, updated 22 September 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), 'Sticky Bombs' Sow Terror and Chaos in a City on Edge, 16 December 2020, [url](#); VOA, Sticky Bomb Attacks Send Wave of Fear Through Kabul, 24 December 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Targeted Killings Are Terrorizing Afghans. And No One Is Claiming Them, 2 January 2021, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, 'Psychological Warfare': Taliban Adopts New Strategy in Afghanistan, 8 January 2021, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 51

⁸²⁴ New York Times (The), 'Sticky Bombs' Sow Terror and Chaos in a City on Edge, 16 December 2020, [url](#)

cooperation between criminal networks and the insurgency in Kabul, offering the Taliban a wider reach and the possibility to stock explosives around the city.⁸²⁵

According to analysts interviewed by Gandhara, the Taliban have adopted a new approach in 2020. Refraining from high profile and mass casualty attacks in major cities, the militants have shifted their tactic to the deliberate targeted killing of civilians (government employees, journalists, human rights activists, moderate religious leaders and women in public roles) in urban areas such as Kabul. This new tactic is described as a response to the agreement the insurgency group signed with the US in February 2020, expecting the militants not to hit urban centres with suicide bombings and other mass-casualty attacks. A Kabul-based political analyst, cited by news agency Gandhara, explained the new Taliban strategy as 'to win the support or submission of the population in government-controlled areas, particularly in urban centres, through intimidation and psychological warfare'.⁸²⁶ The militant's drive to frighten and weaken Afghanistan's civil society and to silence critical voices is additionally mentioned as part of this tactic.⁸²⁷ Although the Taliban are presumably the driving force for several of the targeted killings in Kabul,⁸²⁸ many have remained unclaimed, with the militant group often officially denying its involvement.⁸²⁹ In this regard, the New York Times reported on the Taliban's strategy of refusing to claim responsibility for attacks in Kabul and using the unclaimed attacks for propaganda purposes to spread fear and to undermine the Afghan government's ability to keep the capital safe.⁸³⁰

According to International Crisis Group researcher Andrew Watkins, cited by news agency NPR, 'the Taliban are not only at the gates of Kabul, but inside the city gates'. In December 2020, Taliban militants were reported openly preaching in the Kampany neighbourhood in the city.⁸³¹ In January 2021, Taliban militants were reported strolling through the streets of the western Qalai Abdul Ali neighbourhood. Although not banned from the neighbourhood, the government has reportedly been mostly in hiding in this city area. According to a local Taliban commander, cited by the New Yorker, the militants have been collecting taxes, providing security and patrolling the streets in Qalai Abdul Ali. The Taliban have purportedly moved into this neighbourhood from Wardak province, using the area to stage attacks in other parts of the city.⁸³²

According to UNAMA, the Haqqani Network has assumed an increasingly influential role in the Taliban's military operations and is believed to be responsible for complex attacks on government and international targets in heavily populated areas of Kabul City.⁸³³ According to Taliban expert Antonio Giustozzi, the Haqqani Network is (at least partly) accountable for several recent attacks in the Afghan capital. Referring to a possible division within the Taliban, Giustozzi indicated the

⁸²⁵ New York Times (The), With Delay in Afghan Peace Talks, a Creeping Sense of 'Siege' Around Kabul, 23 August 2020, updated 22 September 2020, [url](#)

⁸²⁶ RFE/RL/Gandhara, 'Psychological Warfare': Taliban Adopts New Strategy in Afghanistan, 8 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸²⁷ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghanistan Hit by Surge of Targeted Killings, Assassinations, 13 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), 'There Is No Safe Area': In Kabul, Fear Has Taken Over, 17 January 2021, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Afghanistan Faces a Brain Drain as Young and Educated Flee a Wave of Violence, 14 February 2021, [url](#); New Yorker (The), Last Exit from Afghanistan, 1 March 2021, [url](#); Guardian (The), Afghans Dread the 'Danger Hours' as Fragile Gains of 20 Years Slip Away, 7 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸²⁸ Watkins, A., [Twitter], posted on: 21 January 2021, [url](#); New Yorker (The), Last Exit from Afghanistan, 1 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸²⁹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghanistan Hit by Surge of Targeted Killings, Assassinations, 13 November 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, 'Psychological Warfare': Taliban Adopts New Strategy in Afghanistan, 8 January 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), 'There Is No Safe Area': In Kabul, Fear Has Taken Over, 17 January 2021, [url](#); UNAMA, Special Report: Killing of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Media Workers in Afghanistan 2018-2021, February 2021, [url](#), p. 8; Telegraph (The), Afghanistan Faces a Brain Drain as Young and Educated Flee a Wave of Violence, 14 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸³⁰ New York Times (The), An Afghan Mayor Expected to Die. Instead, She Lost Her Father, 6 November 2020, updated 12 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), String of Attacks Have People in Kabul Pointing a Finger, at the Government, 7 November 2020, updated 12 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), 'Sticky Bombs' Sow Terror and Chaos in a City on Edge, 16 December 2020, [url](#)

⁸³¹ Npr, 'Our Houses Are Not Safe': Residents Fear Taliban in Afghanistan's Capital, 18 December 2020, [url](#)

⁸³² New Yorker (The), Last Exit from Afghanistan, 1 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸³³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 102

network as responsible for the attacks without the authorisation of the Taliban's Quetta Shura, whose relations with the Haqqanis he described as 'poor'.⁸³⁴ In May 2020, the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reported to the UN Security Council on a 'tactical accommodation' between the Haqqani Network and ISKP in Kabul, referring to a certain degree of 'involvement, facilitation, or the provision of technical assistance' of the Haqqanis in ISKP-claimed attacks in the capital.⁸³⁵ Joint Haqqani Network and ISKP cells operating in Kabul City were reported in May 2020 and February 2021.⁸³⁶ In January 2021, the arrest of an alleged Chinese espionage ring operating in Kabul to hunt down Uighur Muslims with the help of the Haqqani Network was reported by Afghan officials.⁸³⁷

After a period of no ISKP-claimed assaults in Kabul at the end of 2019 and in the first months of 2020, several attacks have been attributed to the group again since March 2020 (see below).⁸³⁸ ISKP's activities were possibly disrupted at the end of 2019 and in the beginning of 2020 due to various raids on the militant group's hideouts in the capital region, according to UN and USDOD reporting.⁸³⁹ In 2020 and 2021, ISKP reportedly has retained its ability to conduct (high-profile and large scale) attacks in Kabul, although the militant group's operational capacity was 'severely degraded', as stated by USDOD.⁸⁴⁰ According to a report submitted to the UN Security Council, some of the attacks claimed by ISKP 'may have arisen wholly or partly from a tactical accommodation with the Haqqani Network'.⁸⁴¹ USDOD suggested the militants might be moving to smaller groups in urban areas, which are harder to locate and identify.⁸⁴² UNAMA reported on a spike of high-impact attacks (mainly caused by IEDs) conducted by ISKP in Kabul and other cities in the final months of 2020.⁸⁴³ Using its official messaging platforms and media outlets to draw attention to these attacks,⁸⁴⁴ the militant group reportedly aims at maintaining its credibility and bolstering its recruitment efforts.⁸⁴⁵ In the first months of 2021, the UN reported on continued ISKP attacks targeting civilians in urban areas,⁸⁴⁶ with the militant group expected to pursue future attacks in the capital.⁸⁴⁷

⁸³⁴ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Deadly Kabul Attacks Expose Possible Divisions within the Taliban, 7 November 2020, [url](#)

⁸³⁵ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 18-19

⁸³⁶ Straits Times (The), Afghan Forces bust 'ISIS-Haqqani' Cell Blamed for Deadly Attacks, 6 May 2020, [url](#); Reuters, U.N. Decries Attacks on Afghan Media at Time when Dialogue Needed Most, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸³⁷ FP, Afghanistan Wanted Chinese Mining Investment. It Got a Chinese Spy Ring Instead, 27 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸³⁸ UN Security Council, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/897-S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁸³⁹ UN Security Council, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2020/95, [url](#), pp. 6-7; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 9

⁸⁴⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 8

⁸⁴¹ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁸⁴² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 28

⁸⁴³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 24, 103

⁸⁴⁴ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Report to the United States Congress, 1 April - 30 June 2020, 18 August 2020, [url](#), p. 16

⁸⁴⁵ USIP, Afghanistan Study Group Final Report, February 2021, [url](#), p. 23

⁸⁴⁶ UN Security Council, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/811-S/2021/252, 12 March 2021, [url](#), pp. 5-6

⁸⁴⁷ UN Security Council, Twelfth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat, 29 January 2021, [url](#), p. 7; UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 15

ISKP is reported to have maintained active as well as sleeper cells in Afghan cities, including in Kabul.⁸⁴⁸ These often coordinate on encrypted messaging applications⁸⁴⁹ and reportedly work independently, avoiding the disclosure of other cells if one is discovered.⁸⁵⁰ According to analyst Borhan Osman, ISKP's Kabul cell is an 'almost entirely Afghan phenomenon', recruiting urban youth from diverse socio-economic backgrounds (often from middle class-families) in the capital and in the surrounding provinces of Parwan, Panjsher and Kapisa. In contrast to the usual pattern of Pashtun recruitment into Afghanistan's militant extremist groups, a majority of Kabul's ISKP cell's members and supporters reportedly come from predominantly Tajik areas.⁸⁵¹ Osman points at the scarcity of reliable information about the Kabul cell's operational methods. Instructions to organise and carry out attacks in the capital have reportedly often been relayed directly to the small circles in Kabul from the ISKP leadership in Nangarhar province. According to senior Afghan security officials, all the ISKP-claimed attacks in the capital depended on the same supply and logistics chain from a single network, also used for attacks by the Taliban (including the Haqqani Network), likely having the support of corrupt government security figures.⁸⁵² In Kabul, ISKP reportedly relies on the *hawala* system to transfer funds.⁸⁵³ In June 2020, Shahab al-Muhajir, referred to as one of the 'urban lions' of ISKP in Kabul and reportedly involved in the planning of suicide and complex attacks, was appointed as ISKP leader in the region.⁸⁵⁴ According to Afghan officials, cited by news agency CBS News in January 2021, members of a joint Taliban-ISKP cell, have reportedly been tasked with disguising themselves as social workers and vaccine administrators, to assassinate journalists in Kabul.⁸⁵⁵

ISKP has applied an effective recruitment strategy in the capital, conducting outreach activities in religious and academic institutions, including Kabul University.⁸⁵⁶ University professors recruiting for ISKP and first-grade students joining their ranks have reportedly given the militant group's cell in the capital an elite character. Mid-career professionals, business owners and well-educated urbanites have been mostly recruited for logistical, financial or communication roles, often leading a double life.⁸⁵⁷ As reported by USDOD, ISKP affiliates use social media as primary communication method and as a propaganda medium to exert influence online.⁸⁵⁸ According to analyst Osman, the growing appeal of ISKP's Salafi-Jihadist ideology among urban Afghan youth may explain the militant group's

⁸⁴⁸ BBC News, Islamic State Group Claims Deadly Attack on Afghanistan Prison, 3 August 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan Journalist Is Killed in Latest Attack on Media Figures, 10 December 2020, updated 11 December 2020, [url](#); UN Security Council, UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 15; VOA, Islamic State Poised for Possible Resurgence in Afghanistan, US Officials Warn, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁹ New York Times (The), As Pompeo Prepared to Meet Afghan Warring Parties, New Attack Struck Kabul, 21 November 2020, updated 27 November 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁰ New York Times (The), Foes in Afghan War See a Common Threat of Islamic State's Return, 22 March 2021, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁵¹ Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-4, 11-14

⁸⁵² Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 9-10; See also: BBC News, Afghanistan Conflict: IS Links to Kabul Student Killings Cause Outrage, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁵³ LWJ, Al Qaeda 'gaining strength' in Afghanistan, U.S. Treasury says, 25 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁴ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 15

⁸⁵⁵ CBS News, Afghan Journalists Are Being Killed for Their Work, and They Just "Want to Stay Alive", 21 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁶ VOA, Afghan University Teacher, Students among IS Operatives Arrested in Kabul, 8 July 2019, [url](#); UN Security Council, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2020/95, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7

⁸⁵⁷ Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-14; see also Washington Post (The), Afghanistan Claims the Islamic State Was 'Obliterated'. But Fighters Who Got Away Could Stage a Resurgence, 9 February 2020, [url](#); Withington, S. & Ehsani, H., Islamic State Wilayat Khorasan: Phoney Caliphate or Bonafide Province, AISS, 5 March 2020, [url](#), p. 86

⁸⁵⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 26

resilience. The search for ideological ‘purity’, commitment to rigidly practicing Islamic Law, support for an anti-Shia sectarian agenda, strong in-group solidarity and egalitarian behaviour, enthusiasm for a global jihad and the ‘fantasy of living under the caliphate’ are suggested as pull-factors attracting Kabul’s youth to ISKP. A growing dissatisfaction with the current elite and the status quo of the Afghan political system is indicated as a push-factor driving urban youth to search for a radical alternative.⁸⁵⁹

According to AAN analyst Kate Clark, the war in Afghanistan became a little ‘murkier’ in 2020,⁸⁶⁰ with a significant increase in unclaimed attacks in Kabul City.⁸⁶¹ Clark suggested this ‘may point to the Taliban carrying out attacks without wanting to appear to do so, or to an actual muddying of the waters, of elements within the Taliban operating without explicit permission from the leadership, or of ISKP now carrying out attacks without claiming them’.⁸⁶² Sources documented on a climate of rising impunity, in which different parties to the conflict have reportedly been accusing each other. While the Afghan government has blamed the Taliban for many attacks in the Afghan capital, the militant group accused the Kabul administration of involvement.⁸⁶³ International Crisis Group’s analyst Andrew Watkins also mentioned other actors may be able and willing to take advantage of the situation of unclaimed attacks,⁸⁶⁴ such as people inside the government directing certain targeted assassinations.⁸⁶⁵

Because of its high concentration of government buildings, international organisations, diplomatic and security forces’ compounds, the capital has a distinct security outlook.⁸⁶⁶ Beginning in 2018, the approval of a new security plan for the Afghan capital was announced⁸⁶⁷ and the Kabul Enhanced Security Zone (ESZ) was established.⁸⁶⁸ New and improved security measures have been implemented since then, including: additional temporary checkpoints, security cameras and access surveillance, additional road blockades, blast walls and increased patrolling, enhanced reconnaissance and intelligence activities.⁸⁶⁹ Kabul’s new security measures were reported to have exacerbated the city’s traffic problems,⁸⁷⁰ and caused resentment and protests among residents.⁸⁷¹ In

⁸⁵⁹ Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 15-20

⁸⁶⁰ Clark, K., *War in Afghanistan in 2020: Just as Much Violence, but No One Wants to Talk about It*, AAN, 16 August 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁶¹ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, 30 January 2021, [url](#), pp. 83, 85; UNAMA, *Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020*, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 18-19, 43-44; USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), pp. 9-10

⁸⁶² Clark, K., *War in Afghanistan in 2020: Just as Much Violence, but No One Wants to Talk about It*, AAN, 16 August 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁶³ Ruttig, T., *A Deal in the Mist: How Much of the US-Taliban Doha Agreement Has Been Implemented?*, AAN, 25 February 2021, [url](#); *Guardian (The)*, *Afghans Dread the ‘Danger Hours’ as Fragile Gains of 20 Years Slip Away*, 7 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁴ Watkins, A., [Twitter], posted on: 21 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁵ *New York Times (The)*, *Targeted Killings Are Terrorizing Afghans. And No One Is Claiming Them*, 2 January 2021, [url](#); *New Yorker (The)*, *Last Exit from Afghanistan*, 1 March 2021, [url](#); *Guardian (The)*, *Afghans Dread the ‘Danger Hours’ as Fragile Gains of 20 Years Slip Away*, 7 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁶ Foschini, F., *Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid*, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 56; Osman, B., *A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who Are the Most Likely Perpetrators?*, AAN, 7 June 2017, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁷ RFE/RL, *New Security Plan In Kabul After Deadly Attacks*, 7 February 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁸ USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, June 2018, 3 July 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 15, 43, 46-47

⁸⁶⁹ EFE, *Kabul Implements New Security Plan Following Repeated Assaults on City*, 18 February 2018, [url](#); *Safer Edge, Safer Edge Insights: New Security Measures in Kabul*, 20 February 2018, [url](#); USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan – December 2018*, 20 December 2018, [url](#), p. 36; *Washington Post (The)*, *A Photo Tour of Kabul Shows How 20 Years of U.S. Military Presence Reshaped Afghanistan’s Capital*, 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁰ *Frontier Post (The)*, *Kabul’s New Security Plan Irks Residents*, 23 February 2018, [url](#); *Tolonews*, *WAK Residents Bear The Brunt Of Tightened Security*, 5 March 2018, [url](#); *Washington Post (The)*, *A Photo Tour of Kabul Shows How 20 Years of U.S. Military Presence Reshaped Afghanistan’s Capital*, 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁷¹ *Reuters*, *Kabul’s Expanding Foreigner ‘Bubble’ Trades Safety for Isolation*, 19 March 2019, [url](#); *New York Times (The)*, *After Bombing, Afghans Demand That Foreigners Leave Their Neighbourhood*, 4 September 2019, [url](#); *Washington Post (The)*, *A Photo Tour of Kabul Shows How 20 Years of U.S. Military Presence Reshaped Afghanistan’s Capital*, 25 March 2021, [url](#)

mid-2020, the implementation of a new security plan for Kabul City was ordered by President Ghani.⁸⁷² This 'Security Charter' has reportedly been implemented in the second half of 2020 and further in 2021, with Vice President Amrullah Saleh taking charge of security in the capital. An increased police presence has been reported, by handing over responsibility for checkpoints surrounding Kabul to the army.⁸⁷³

In terms of the presence of government security forces, ANP forces have maintained responsibility for security within the city, with the special Crisis Response Unit (CRU) 222 and Commando Force 333 providing crisis response and high-risk arrest support in Kabul.⁸⁷⁴ The capital has its own independent 111th ANA Division.⁸⁷⁵ ANDSF forces have begun a concerted effort to dismantle AGE groups active in and around the Kabul metropolitan area,⁸⁷⁶ with a new Command of the Joint Forces established in June 2020.⁸⁷⁷ Examples of such military operations in 2020 and 2021 included: the arrest of nine ISKP sympathisers providing financial support to the insurgence group, in February 2020;⁸⁷⁸ several raids on ISKP and Haqqani hideouts in May 2020, resulting in the arrest of three prominent ISKP figures and the killing of several other militants;⁸⁷⁹ the arrest of two ISKP-affiliates, allegedly planning attacks on a hospital and media outlet in the city, in July 2020;⁸⁸⁰ the arrest of a prominent ISKP-leader, reportedly responsible for several attacks and the assassination of two religious scholars, in September 2020;⁸⁸¹ the arrest of the Taliban's shadow governor for Kabul in January 2021;⁸⁸² and the dismantling of two joint ISKP-Haqqani Network cells, reportedly responsible for targeted killings in the capital, in February 2021.⁸⁸³

Security concerns in Kabul are not limited to AGE attacks alone, but include a rise in criminality, as documented by several sources in 2020 and 2021.⁸⁸⁴ This is reportedly related to growing unemployment,⁸⁸⁵ combined with the increasing influence of heavily armed and politically connected criminal networks, as well as the impact of changing patterns in the social behaviour of Kabul's youth.⁸⁸⁶ AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini differentiates between targeted killings disguised as

⁸⁷² Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on: 30 June 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁷³ Al Jazeera, At least Four Killed, Many Wounded in Afghanistan Attacks, 28 December 2020, [url](#); UN Security Council, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/811-S/2021/252, 12 March 2021, [url](#), p. 5

⁸⁷⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 60

⁸⁷⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 13, 58; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 39

⁸⁷⁶ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 18-19; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁷⁷ Khaama Press, Command Joint Forces Established to Root Out Terror Cells, Criminal Gangs in Kabul, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁸ Khaama Press, NDS Forces Arrest 9 ISIS Sympathisers from a Landmark Mall in Kabul City, 12 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁹ BBC News, IS Regional Leader Sheikh Khorsani 'Arrested in Afghanistan', 11 May 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 'Key' Daesh Leaders Arrested in Kabul: NDS, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁰ Tolonews, NDS Prevents Attacks Targeting Media Outlet, Hospital in Kabul, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸¹ Tolonews, NDS Arrests Daesh Leader Who 'Planned Killings of Kabul Imams', 10 September 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸² Bakhtar News, Prominent Taliban Member Arrested in Kabul, 31 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁸³ Reportedly, NDS Arrested Members of Haqqani-IS-K Joint Terror Cell in Kabul, 9 February 2021, [url](#); Reportedly, NDS Busts Haqqani-IS-K Network Cell in Kabul, 21 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁴ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#); UN Security Council, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary General, 18 August 2020, [url](#), p. 5; RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Vice President Takes Charge of Capital Amid Rise in Crime, 17 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), String of Attacks Have People in Kabul Pointing a Finger, at the Government, 7 November 2020, updated 12 November 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, A Day on the Job with Kabul's Crime Scene Investigators, 1 February 2021, [url](#); AP, Crime, Conflict, Chaos Crushing Afghan Hopes for Tomorrow, 4 February 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), In Kabul's Streets, Dogs Rule the Night, 21 March 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Vice President Takes Charge of Capital Amid Rise in Crime, 17 October 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, A Day on the Job with Kabul's Crime Scene Investigators, 1 February 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), In Kabul's Streets, Dogs Rule the Night, 21 March 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁶ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

criminally-motivated attacks and common criminality in the city.⁸⁸⁷ home raids and personally-driven murders,⁸⁸⁸ organised petty crime on public transport, violent theft, burglaries⁸⁸⁹ and armed robberies,⁸⁹⁰ car-jackings, narco-trafficking and drug-related crimes⁸⁹¹ in several city areas and kidnappings⁸⁹² by organised criminal gangs.⁸⁹³ According to UNAMA, continued abductions by armed groups/elements and criminal gangs in large cities such as Kabul are often under-reported, indicating it regularly received notice of such events in 2020, including incidents targeting NGO workers and UN staff members.⁸⁹⁴ Children as well as adults have reportedly been kidnapped from the streets for ransoms ranging from USD 50 to USD 5 000.⁸⁹⁵ Several sources documented difficulties faced by ANDSF forces in responding to Kabul's rapidly expanding crime scene,⁸⁹⁶ with reports of bribery and security officers involved in crime themselves.⁸⁹⁷ According to Foschini, there is 'a *modus vivendi* between the police and criminals' in many city neighbourhoods, with powerful and deeply-rooted (political) interests often resulting in impunity.⁸⁹⁸ Mid-July 2020, the 'Mobilizing the People in the Fight against Crime' program was launched by the Afghan government as part of the new Security Charter for Kabul, intensifying operations against criminal gangs and armed robbers in the capital region.⁸⁹⁹ The continuation of this program was reported in 2021,⁹⁰⁰ including measures such as: street-to-street intelligence coverage, registering undocumented vehicles, tracking down land-grabbers, documenting thieves (with pictures of people accused of crimes posted across Kabul)⁹⁰¹ and digitalizing information, preventing the transfer of drugs inside schools and demolishing illegal

⁸⁸⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁸ Tolonews, 4 Members of One Family Killed in Kabul, 19 January 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁹ UN Security Council, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General, 18 August 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁸⁹⁰ Tolonews, University Professor Wounded as Armed Robbery Increases in Kabul, 8 January 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, KP Reporter Traumatized after Being Robbed at Gunpoint close to Kabul Police Station, 24 March 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Crime Remains High in Kabul City, Ex-Police Official Killed, 21 October 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Armed Robberies Persist, Kabul Residents Demand Action, 5 January 2021, [url](#); AP, Crime, Conflict, Chaos Crushing Afghan Hopes for Tomorrow, 4 February 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, 4 People Killed, 4 Wounded by Violent Crime in Kabul Since Sunday, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁹¹ Tolonews, Interior Ministry Pledges Crackdown on Drug Dealers, 7 February 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Crime Remains High in Kabul City, Ex-Police Official Killed, 21 October 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Girl Rescued, 2 Suspected Abductors Held in Kabul, 14 June 2020, [url](#); UN Security Council, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General, 18 August 2020, [url](#), p. 5; AP, Crime, Conflict, Chaos Crushing Afghan Hopes for Tomorrow, 4 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁹³ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 5-13, 15-16, 19-20, 22, 26; Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal Activities and the Police Response, AAN, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 58

⁸⁹⁵ AP, Crime, Conflict, Chaos Crushing Afghan Hopes for Tomorrow, 4 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁶ New York Times (The), They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime?, 8 February 2020, [url](#); Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal Activities and the Police Response, AAN, 21 February 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Armed Robberies Persist, Kabul Residents Demand Action, 5 January 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, Kabul: Calls for Security Mount as Violence Continues, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁷ Al Jazeera, A Day on the Job with Kabul's Crime Scene Investigators, 1 February 2021, [url](#); AP, Analysis: NATO Faces Conundrum as It Mulls Afghan Pullout, 16 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁸ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal Activities and the Police Response, AAN, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁹ Tolonews, Police Target Paghman Gang Accused of Robbing Kabul Residents, 17 July 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁰ UN Security Council, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/811-S/2021/252, 12 March 2021, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁰¹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Vice President Takes Charge of Capital Amid Rise in Crime, 17 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), String of Attacks Have People in Kabul Pointing a Finger, at the Government, 7 November 2020, updated 12 November 2020, [url](#)

buildings.⁹⁰² Additionally, hundreds of surveillance cameras would reportedly be installed across Kabul to tackle street crime.⁹⁰³

2.1.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In the first three quarters of 2020, few high-profile attacks were reported in Kabul City.⁹⁰⁴ In the last quarter of 2020, SIGAR reported on a ‘much higher’ number of enemy-initiated attacks in Kabul, compared to the same quarter in 2019.⁹⁰⁵ Documenting the last quarter of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021, the UN Secretary-General reported on continued countrywide high-profile attacks by AGEs, especially in the city of Kabul, in combination with a pattern of increased unclaimed targeted assassinations.⁹⁰⁶

In October 2020, AAN reported on ‘a carefully calibrated campaign of violence using magnetic IEDs, suicide bombers and small teams of gunmen in Kabul’.⁹⁰⁷ Contrasted to previous years, when ‘deaths were mainly caused by the proximity of individuals to mass casualty attacks by organised armed groups, mainly ISKP’, as cited by analyst Kate Clark,⁹⁰⁸ the most recent wave of civilian casualties shows the ‘intentional, premeditated and deliberate targeting of individuals with perpetrators remaining anonymous’, as reported by UNAMA.⁹⁰⁹ Since all parties to the conflict have been reporting their attacks much more sparingly after the signing of the Doha Agreement in February 2020, a concentration of unattributed insurgent attacks has been ballooning in urban areas.⁹¹⁰ Throughout 2020, UNAMA documented an increase in civilian casualties in incidents attributed to ‘undetermined anti-government elements’. The majority of these incidents were suicide and non-suicide IEDs, including incidents causing high numbers of civilian casualties in provincial capitals, followed by targeted killings. Several of such incidents were documented in Kabul City in 2020 (see below).⁹¹¹

UNAMA expressed its concern on the continuing trend of AGE attacks deliberately targeting civilians in 2020, including attacks on members of the judiciary, healthcare workers and facilities, education-related personnel and facilities as well as civilians at educational institutions, aid workers, human rights defenders and civil society activists, journalists and civilians working for the civilian government administration. Assassinations, suicide and non-suicide IEDs, abductions and punishments under the guise of enforcing decisions of their parallel justice structures were reported as the main tactics of AGEs in targeting civilians. Several of such incidents were documented in Kabul City in 2020 (see below).⁹¹² Additionally, civilian family members of ANDSF forces were often killed

⁹⁰² Tolonews, Crime Remains High in Kabul City, Ex-Police Official Killed, 21 October 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁰³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Vice President Takes Charge of Capital Amid Rise in Crime, 17 October 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Kabul to Install Surveillance Cameras to Combat Crime, 6 January 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, Kabul to be Covered by Security Cameras: Saleh, 6 January 2021 (edited 7 January 2021, [url](#))

⁹⁰⁴ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, Report to the United States Congress, 1 April - 30 June 2020, 18 August 2020, [url](#), p. 14; USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, Report to the United States Congress, 1 July - 30 September 2020, 17 November 2020, [url](#), pp. 14-15

⁹⁰⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), pp. 23, 50-51

⁹⁰⁶ UN Security Council, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/811-S/2021/25212 March 2021, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁰⁷ Quilty, A., Taliban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan Conflict Has Changed since the Doha Agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁸ Clark, K., [Twitter], posted on: 15 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁹ UNAMA, Killing of Human Rights Defenders and Media Professionals in Afghanistan, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹¹⁰ Clark, K., Behind the Statistics: Drop in Civilian Casualties Masks Increased Taliban Violence, 27 October 2020, [url](#)

⁹¹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 18-19, 43-44, 56-57

⁹¹² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 14, 18-19, 53, 54-55

as collateral damage in attacks targeting on- and off-duty police and army personnel in the capital.⁹¹³ In the first quarter of 2021, UNAMA expressed its continued concern about the deliberate targeting of civilians by AGEs, particularly through targeted killings and including a trend of targeting of women.⁹¹⁴

Although UNAMA reported a countrywide decrease in the number of civilian casualties attributed to ISKP for the second year in row, the vast majority of casualties caused by ISKP in 2020 resulted from mass-casualty attacks and mass-shootings in the cities of Kabul and Jalalabad. The use of small arms fire inside buildings and during open-air gatherings, suicide and non-suicide IEDs and ground engagements (e.g. the firing of rockets into Kabul City) were reported as ISKP tactics causing most civilian casualties. UNAMA expressed its concern that more than 80 % of civilian casualties attributed to ISKP were caused by attacks deliberately targeting civilians, such as civilians at educational facilities and civilians belonging to religious minority populations such as Shi'a Muslims and Sikhs, with several examples of such attacks recorded in Kabul City (see below).⁹¹⁵

ACLED collected data on 211 violent events in Kabul district⁹¹⁶ from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021 from reports in open sources, of which 52 were coded as 'battles', 120 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 39 as 'violence against civilians'.⁹¹⁷

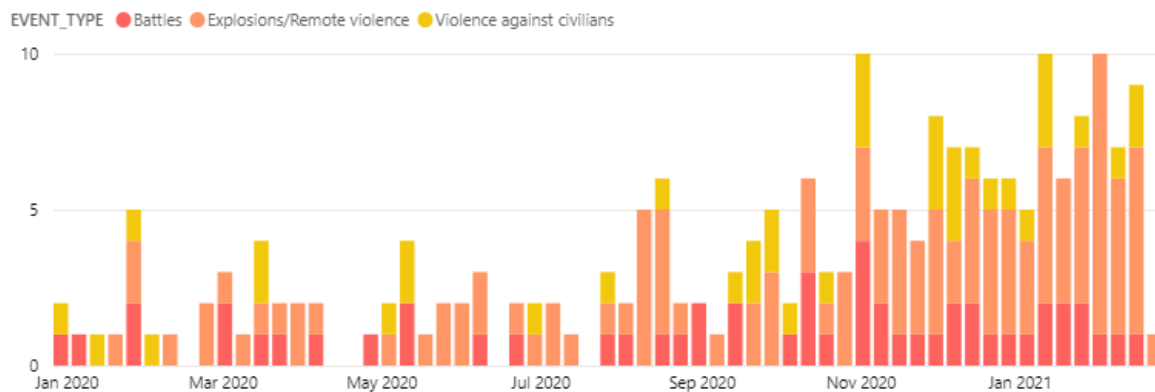


Figure 3: Kabul district - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data⁹¹⁸

Over 50 % of all recorded security incidents in Kabul district were coded as 'remote explosives, landmines and IEDs' by ACLED, representing the most prevalent incident type in Kabul during the reporting period.⁹¹⁹ The majority of these incidents were caused by unidentified armed groups,

⁹¹³ Clark, K., Civilian Casualties Worsened as Intra-Afghan Talks Began, Says UNAMA's 2020 Report on the Protection of Civilians, AAN, 23 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹¹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - First Quarter Update: 1 January to 31 March 2021, 14 April 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁹¹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 18, 24, 43, 54-56, 74, 103

⁹¹⁶ ACLED does not differentiate between Kabul City and Kabul district.

⁹¹⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul District, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹¹⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul District, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); incidents for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 - see introduction)

⁹¹⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul District, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

targeting ANDSF forces (police,⁹²⁰ military⁹²¹ and NDS⁹²²) as well as government officials⁹²³/employees,⁹²⁴ journalists/media workers,⁹²⁵ religious leaders/scholars,⁹²⁶ human rights defenders/activists,⁹²⁷ judicial personnel,⁹²⁸ foreign diplomatic personnel,⁹²⁹ health workers,⁹³⁰ educational personnel⁹³¹ and religious minority members.⁹³² Many of these incidents caused several casualties among civilians in the Afghan capital,⁹³³ with most casualties reported on 9 September 2020 in a car bomb explosion targeting the convoy of Vice President Amrullah Saleh in the area of

⁹²⁰ Khaama Press, Back to Back Explosions Rock Kabul City, 12 April 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Wounded in Kabul Magnetic Bomb Explosion, 4 July 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Explosion in Kabul City Leaves at least 3 Dead, Wounded, 28 July 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Kabul Magnetic Bombs Rattle the City, 22 August 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, No Casualties as Bomb Blast Hits Police Vehicle, 12 January 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹²¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Injured in Kabul Magnetic Bomb Explosion, 11 July 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Kabul Attacks: 3 Security Force Members Killed in Past 24 Hours, 13 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Security Personnel Injured in Kabul Explosion, 3 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹²² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#)

⁹²³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Education Ministry Official Killed in Kabul Blast, 19 August 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, AIC Official's Driver Killed in Kabul Explosion, 4 October 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Bomb Blast Kills Deputy Governor of Afghanistan's Capital, 15 December 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Govt Official's Vehicle Hit by Magnetic Bomb in Kabul, 18 January 2021, [url](#); Heart of Asia, Blast Hits Vehicle of State Ministry for Peace Affairs Official, 1 February 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, 3 Bombs Hit Kabul, 2 Bodies Found in Deh Sabz, 7 February 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, 2 Wounded in Blast Targeting Govt Official in Kabul, 8 February 2021, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - First Quarter Update: 1 January to 31 March 2021, 14 April 2021, [url](#), p. 4

⁹²⁴ Khaama Press, Second Explosion Close to Electricity Pylon in Kabul leaves 4 Wounded, 4 May 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Blast Targets Govt Employees' Bus in Kabul, 28 December 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Employee of Afghan President's Office 'Critically Wounded,' Driver Killed in Bomb Blast, 31 December 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Public Protection Force Spokesman Killed in Kabul IED Blast, 10 January 2021, [url](#)

⁹²⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Media Workers Killed, Several Injured in Kabul Blast, 30 May 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Renowned Journalist Killed in a 'Magnetic IED' Blast: Kabul, 7 November 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Former TV News Presenter Killed in Kabul Car Bombing, 7 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Prominent Cleric Killed in Kabul Mosque Bombing, 2 June 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Four Killed in Mosque Blast in Western Kabul, Including Imam, 12 June 2020, updated 13 June 2020, [url](#)

⁹²⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, updated 25 June 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Two Human Rights Workers Killed in Kabul, 27 June 2020, updated 28 June 2020, [url](#)

⁹²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Sticky Bomb Blast Leaves 4 Injured in Kabul, 13 July 2020, [url](#)

⁹²⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Russian Embassy Staffers Hurt in Kabul IED Blast, 2 December 2020, [url](#); DW, Afghanistan: Italian Embassy Vehicle Targeted in Kabul, 25 January 2021, [url](#)

⁹³⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#); VOA, Doctors Killed in Afghanistan Explosion, 22 December 2020, [url](#)

⁹³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, University Teacher Killed in Kabul Explosion, 18 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹³² RFE/RL, Blast Rocks Funeral Services for Sikhs Killed in Kabul Attack, 26 March 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Including a Hindu Killed in Kabul Explosions, 6 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹³³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Injured as Magnetic Bomb Blast Rocks Kabul, 30 March 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Civilians Killed as Bomb Explosion Rocks Kabul, 11 June 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul Blast Leaves 3 Dead, 10 Wounded, 27 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 2 Killed, 2 Wounded in Kabul Magnetic IED Blast, 13 December 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#)

Taimani, killing 10 civilians and injuring 15-31 more (including the Vice President).⁹³⁴ Some of the IED incidents in Kabul were attributed to the Taliban⁹³⁵ or ISKP.⁹³⁶

ACLED recorded around 25 % of the violent incidents in Kabul district as ‘battles’, all of which were coded as ‘armed clashes’.⁹³⁷ The three largest ‘armed clashes’ causing most civilian casualties were: an ISKP-claimed assault targeting a ceremony commemorating the death of an ethnic Hazara leader in the Dasht-e Barchi area in on 6 March 2020, resulting in 33 civilians killed and 79 injured;⁹³⁸ an ISKP-claimed gunmen attack on a Sikh temple and housing complex in the Shorbazaar area on 25 March 2020, taking 80 people hostage, killing 26 civilians and injuring 11 more in an hours’ long siege;⁹³⁹ and an unclaimed attack targeting the maternity ward of an MSF hospital as well in the Dasht-e Barchi neighbourhood on 12 May 2020, killing 23 civilians and injuring another 23, including mothers who had just given birth, new-born infants and health care personnel.⁹⁴⁰ Other examples of these ‘armed clashes’ were attacks/ambushes by the Taliban or unidentified armed groups on the Afghan security forces, including military,⁹⁴¹ police⁹⁴² and NDS personnel⁹⁴³ as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis*.⁹⁴⁴ These incidents resulted in several casualties among the ANDSF forces. Some clashes between ANDSF forces and the insurgency in Kabul City resulted in casualties among Taliban militants.⁹⁴⁶

⁹³⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); VOA, Afghan Vice President Survives Deadly Blast, 9 September 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Roadside Bomb Attack Misses Afghan Vice President, but Kills 10, 9 September 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 Killed, 15 Injured in Attack on VP’s Convoy, 9 September 2020, [url](#); DW, Kabul Bomb Attack Targets Afghanistan’s VP Saleh, Kills 10 Civilians, 9 September 2020, [url](#)

⁹³⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Roadside Bomb Kills Three in Kabul, Including Afghan Security Spokesman, 10 January 2021, [url](#)

⁹³⁶ Al Jazeera, Journalist Killed in Kabul Bomb Blast Targeting TV Workers, 31 May 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Two Killed in Bomb Attack inside Kabul Mosque, 2 June 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#)

⁹³⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul District, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹³⁸ Civilian casualty data according to UNAMA. RFE/RL, Dozens Killed in Kabul Attack Claimed by Islamic State, 6 March 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Dozens Killed in Kabul Ceremony Attack Claimed by ISIL, 6 March 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 55-56

⁹³⁹ Civilian casualty data according to UNAMA. Al Jazeera, Gunmen Storm Sikh Religious Complex in Kabul, Many Feared Trapped, 25 March 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Terror Attack Strikes Afghan Capital as Another City Is Locked Down for Coronavirus, 25 March 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 55-56

⁹⁴⁰ Civilian casualty data according to UNAMA. New York Times (The), From Maternity Ward to Cemetery, a Morning of Murder in Afghanistan, 12 May 2020, [url](#); BBC News, Afghan Attack: Maternity Ward Death Toll Climbs to 24, 13 May 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 14

⁹⁴¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 ANA Soldier Shot Dead, Another Wounded in Kabul, 17 May 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Military Officer Gunned down in Kabul, 8 November 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Four Security Force Members Killed in Attacks in Kabul: Police, 11 November 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Afghan Forces Pilot, Security Officer Killed in Kabul, 7 January 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁴² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Gunmen Kill Policeman, Wound 2 More in Kabul, 22 June 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); Xinhua, Senior Police Officer Gunned down in Afghan Capital, 5 September 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Police Attacked by Gunmen in Bagrami, Kabul, 1 Dead, 15 December 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁴³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁴ For more information on *arbaki*: see section 1.2.1 Pro-government forces.

⁹⁴⁵ According to Taliban reporting. EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul District, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁶ AA, Key Pakistani Taliban Leader Killed in Afghanistan, 7 February 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, 1 Killed, 3 Wounded during a Clash in Kabul City, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

Four incidents were registered as ‘suicide bombs’ in Kabul district by ACLED, in three of these incidents civilian casualties were reported.⁹⁴⁷ In February 2020, two civilians were killed and eight more injured (alongside several ANA casualties) by an unidentified suicide bomber in the Charah-e Qambar area of PD 5. Government officials blamed the Taliban for the attack.⁹⁴⁸ On 24 October 2020, 40 civilians were killed and 79 injured, mainly students, in a suicide attack targeting the Kosar Danish educational centre in the Hazara-populated neighbourhood of Dasht-e Barchi. ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack.⁹⁴⁹ On 20 December 2020, at least nine civilians (including security guards) were killed and 52 wounded in a suicide car bomb targeting the convoy of member of parliament Khan Mohammad Wardak (who was also wounded) in the Spin Kalay area of PD 5. There was no claim of responsibility for the attack.⁹⁵⁰

Around 3 % of the violent incidents in Kabul district were coded as ‘shelling, artillery and missile attacks’ by ACLED.⁹⁵¹ In March 2020, several ISKP-claimed missiles hit the site where President Ashraf Ghani took the oath of office as president.⁹⁵² Information on civilian casualties reported during this incident was not found among the sources consulted. In August 2020,⁹⁵³ November 2020,⁹⁵⁴ and December 2020,⁹⁵⁵ dozens of rockets were fired by ISKP on several residential areas in Kabul City. In these incidents, 14 civilians were reportedly killed and dozens injured.⁹⁵⁶

ACLED categorised around 18 % of all reported violent incidents in Kabul district as ‘violence against civilians’.⁹⁵⁷ The majority of these incidents were attacks by unidentified armed groups on government officials/employees,⁹⁵⁸ civil society members such as religious scholars,⁹⁵⁹ imams/prayer

⁹⁴⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul District, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁹ Civilian casualty data according to UNAMA. New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Deadly Explosion Hits Kabul Tutoring Center, 24 October 2020, updated 27 October 2020, [url](#); BBC News, Afghan Bombing: Kabul Education Centre Attack Kills at least 24, 25 October 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 54-55

⁹⁵⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Lawmaker Survives Deadly Car Bombing in Kabul, 20 December 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Death Toll of Kabul’s Attack on MP Rises to 10, 21 December 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul District, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁵² New York Times (The), Ghani Takes the Oath of Afghan President. His Rival Does, Too, 9 March 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Rockets Fired at Presidential Palace during Ghani Speech, 9 March 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵³ Al Jazeera, Rockets Hit near Main Diplomatic District in Kabul: Official, 18 August 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 3 Killed, 16 Wounded in Kabul Rocket Attacks, 19 August 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁴ DW, Afghanistan: Several Dead as Barrage of Rockets Hits Kabul, 21 November 2020, [url](#); VOA, Islamic State Claims Deadly Kabul Rocket Attack, 22 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁵ Tolonews, Rockets Landed in Various Parts of Kabul; 1 Killed, 12 December 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, One Killed as Multiple Rockets Hit Afghan Capital, 12 December 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul District, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁸ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Pompeo Condemns Attack on Afghan ‘Woman of Courage’ Award Recipient, 25 March 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Atmar’s Secretary Shot Injured in Kabul, 15 May 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, MoD Official Shot Dead along with Guard in Kabul, 22 August 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Uruzgan Lawmaker Survives Gun Attack in Kabul, 20 September 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Mayor Ghafari Survives Another Attempt on Her Life, 3 October 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, 2 Gov’t Employees Shot Dead in Kabul, 4 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, Four Govt Employees Killed in Kabul, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Religious Scholar Shot Dead in Kabul, 21 March 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Religious Scholar, Former Cop Killed in Kabul, 10 December 2020, [url](#)

leaders,⁹⁶⁰ judicial personnel (lawyers,⁹⁶¹ prosecutors,⁹⁶² judges⁹⁶³ and a court official⁹⁶⁴), (civil society) activists,⁹⁶⁵ health workers⁹⁶⁶ and former or off-duty security personnel.⁹⁶⁷ The largest attack coded by ACLED in this category and causing most civilian casualties happened on 2 November 2020, when gunmen stormed Kabul University firing on students and teachers and holding several students hostage for hours. A joint operation by the Afghan and US military forces ended the assault, that resulted in the killing of at least 32 civilians and the injuring of dozens more. Although ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack, Afghan government officials blamed the Taliban.⁹⁶⁸ Mid-November 2020, ANDSF forces reportedly detained the 'mastermind' behind the attack, allegedly a former university student before being recruited by the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani Network.⁹⁶⁹

According to UNAMA, the deliberate targeting of civil society leaders, human rights defenders and journalists in many locations across the country (including Kabul City), and the absence of claims of responsibility by perpetrators, has generated a climate of fear among the civilian population.⁹⁷⁰ A variety of sources in 2020 and 2021 referred to an atmosphere of constant fear gripping Kabul and its residents, caused by a wave of unclaimed 'sticky bomb' attacks and targeted assassinations by unknown gunmen.⁹⁷¹ Some of the capital's residents have reportedly developed different coping strategies in an attempt to avoid the daily pattern of attacks, like changing routines/routes,⁹⁷² avoiding commuting during morning rush hour, when most incidents occur,⁹⁷³ spending weeknights

⁹⁶⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Prayer Leader Gunned Down in Kabul, Say Police, 10 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁶¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁶² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Gov't Prosecutor Murdered in Kabul, 6 December 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Local Prosecutor Shot Dead in Kabul, 13 December 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Prosecutor Killed by Unknown Gunmen in Kabul, 13 December 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁶³ DW, Afghanistan: Gunmen Shoot Dead Two Female Judges, 17 January 2021, [url](#); Reuters, Gunmen Kill Two Female Supreme Court Judges in Afghanistan: Police, 17 January 2021, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - First Quarter Update: 1 January to 31 March 2021, 14 April 2021, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁶⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, UN Expresses Alarm after Head of Afghan Election-Monitoring Group Killed, 23 December 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Yousuf Rasheed, FEFA Head and Activist, Killed by Gunmen, 23 December 2020, edited 24 December 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Two Separate Attacks Claim Civil Society Activist, Tribal Leader, 1 January 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, Baghlan Civil Society Activist Killed in Kabul: Police, 1 January 2021, edited 2 January 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁶ Tolonews, Tolonews 10pm News 19 January 2021, 20 January 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁷ Khaama Press, Former Kabul Police Chief Injured by Unknown Gunmen, 2 February 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Former Police Official Gunned Down in Kabul, 21 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Religious Scholar, Former Cop Killed in Kabul, 10 December 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Afghan Forces Pilot, Security Officer Killed in Kabul, 7 January 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁸ New York Times (The), Gunmen Storm Kabul University, Killing at Least 19, 2 November 2020, updated 21 November 2020, [url](#); BBC News, Kabul University: 22 Dead, More Wounded as Gunmen Storm Campus, 2 November 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Gunmen Storm Kabul University, Killing 22, in Second Deadly Attack on Students in Just over a Week, 2 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁹ DW, Afghanistan: 'Mastermind' behind Kabul University Attack Arrested, 14 November 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Forces Report Capture of 'Mastermind' behind Deadly Attack on Kabul University, 14 November 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghan Forces Capture 'Mastermind' of Kabul University Attack, 14 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁰ UNAMA, Special Report: Killing of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Media Workers in Afghanistan 2018-2021, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 3, 4, 9, 10, 15, 25

⁹⁷¹ Guardian (The), 'We Live in Constant Fear': Kabul Buries Its Dead after Isis Attack on University, 4 November 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghanistan Hit by Surge of Targeted Killings, Assassinations, 13 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), 'Sticky Bombs' Sow Terror and Chaos in a City on Edge, 16 December 2020, [url](#); Reuters, 'The fear is intense': Afghan 'Sticky Bombs', Used by Taliban, On the Rise, 17 December 2020, [url](#); VOA, Sticky Bomb Attacks Send Wave of Fear Through Kabul, 24 December 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), 'There Is No Safe Area': In Kabul, Fear Has Taken Over, 17 January 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, 'Where is the security?': Brother of Slain Afghan Woman Judge, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁷² New York Times (The), 'There Is No Safe Area': In Kabul, Fear Has Taken Over, 17 January 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁷³ Al Jazeera, Gov't Employees, Police Officers among 8 Killed in Afghanistan, 9 February 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Two More Killed as Afghan Capital Reels under Near-Daily Violence, 10 February 2021, [url](#)

at the office,⁹⁷⁴ or preferring to stay home.⁹⁷⁵ The surge of violence and targeted killings in Kabul has reportedly fuelled a growing discontent with an Afghan government unable to protect its citizens,⁹⁷⁶ causing a public outcry for better security in the capital.⁹⁷⁷ Mid-February 2021, a protest of hundreds of city residents was reported in front of the Lower House of Parliament, accusing the Afghan government of neglect in addressing the spike of unclaimed killings and calling for a thorough investigation.⁹⁷⁸ Many young and educated middle-class urbanites, who have the possibility to leave, reportedly flee the wave of violence, causing the fear for a brain drain out of the Afghan capital.⁹⁷⁹

Displacement

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Kabul district⁹⁸⁰ was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2020 - 28 February 2021. During the same period UNOCHA collected data on 3 652 persons displaced to Kabul district. The IDPs arriving in Kabul district came from a range of different provinces, such as Badakhshan, Baghlan, Bamyān, Daykundi, Faryab, Ghazni, Kapisa, Kunduz, Logar, Nangarhar, Samangan, Takhar and Wardak. The largest groups came from the provinces of Baghlan (959) (mostly from Dahan-e Ghorī and Doshi districts, with a peak in the first quarter of 2020), Wardak (448) (mainly from Saydabad district, with a peak in April 2020, and a smaller number from Jalrez district) and Ghazni (420) (all from Andar district, with a peak in March 2020). Smaller groups of IDPs arriving in Kabul district came from the provinces of Logar (315) (all from Baraki Barak and Charkh districts from January to September 2020), Daykundi (301) (mainly from Nili and Gizab/Patoo districts in January and July 2020), Kunduz (271) (mainly from Chardara district in January-February 2020 and from Dasht-e Archi district in October and December 2020 and in February 2021), Kapisa (238) (all from Tagab district in January-February 2020 and July-August 2020), Faryab (210) (all from Dawlatabad district in February 2020) and Bamyān (175) (from Shibar and Sayghan districts in January-February 2020). From the other provinces mentioned above less than 150 displaced persons found refuge in Kabul district.⁹⁸¹

According to a 2012 urban displacement study on Kabul, different categories of IDPs have been discerned in the city: (1) those fleeing armed conflict and insecurity, (2) returnees who could not return to their area of origin and live in secondary displacement, (3) those displaced from rural areas because of natural disasters, localized conflicts or a shortage of work, essential services and food, and (4) migratory groups/nomads such as Kuchis and Jogis residing in the city because conflict disrupted their migration patterns and livelihood or because of increasing impoverishment.⁹⁸² According to AAN analyst Foschini, 'more than half of the residents of Kabul were not born there'.⁹⁸³ The total number of IDPs in Kabul is not known, as movement to and within the city is fluid and

⁹⁷⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 81

⁹⁷⁵ FP, 'This is the Darkest Moment': Afghans Flee a Crumbling Country, 24 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁶ New York Times (The), String of Attacks Have People in Kabul Pointing a Finger, at the Government, 7 November 2020, updated 12 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁷ New York Times (The), An Afghan Mayor Expected to Die. Instead, She Lost Her Father, 6 November 2020, updated 12 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Three Women Working for a News Outlet Are Gunned Down in Afghanistan, 2 March 2021, updated 4 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁸ Reportedly, Protesters in Kabul: Govt Neglecting in Investigation of Targeted Killings, 18 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁹ Npr, 'Our Houses Are Not Safe': Residents Fear Taliban in Afghanistan's Capital, 18 December 2020, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Afghanistan Faces a Brain Drain as Young and Educated Flee a Wave of Violence, 14 February 2021, [url](#); FP, 'This is the Darkest Moment': Afghans Flee a Crumbling Country, 24 February 2021, [url](#); National (The), Afghanistan Faces its Darkest Hour since 2001 as US Considers Pull-Out, 25 February 2021, updated 3 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁰ UNOCHA does not differentiate between Kabul City and Kabul district.

⁹⁸¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁸² Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 7

⁹⁸³ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

many return regularly to their area of origin during more peaceful periods.⁹⁸⁴ Based on data from the first half of 2020, IOM ranked Kabul district fourth out of the countrywide top 25 districts hosting most IDPs and returnees.⁹⁸⁵ As violence has increased in several parts of the country, migration to Kabul rose by 30 % in 2020, according to UN reporting.⁹⁸⁶

IDPs in Kabul have often settled in areas at the outskirts of the city, such as Bagrami and PDs 8, 12, 13, 16 and 21,⁹⁸⁷ mingling with other groups such as the urban poor, economic migrants and returnees.⁹⁸⁸ The lack of adequate land and affordable housing in the urban area forced most new and protracted IDPs in Kabul to reside in tents, mud brick and tarpaulin shelters in one of the around 55 to 60 informal and illegal settlements near the city.⁹⁸⁹ These are often referred to as 'Kabul Informal Settlements' (KIS), varying in size from dozens to hundreds of dwellings.⁹⁹⁰ The IDPs arriving and residing in Kabul have added pressure on the community, basic services and social infrastructure, with an increasingly limited absorption capacity reported in the city.⁹⁹¹ Afghanistan's capital has been facing a severe water shortage for some years now, affecting groups like displaced people.⁹⁹²

With limited job opportunities,⁹⁹³ few or no social protection nets, poor shelter/housing conditions,⁹⁹⁴ high land tenure insecurity,⁹⁹⁵ impeded access to education, healthcare and sanitation,⁹⁹⁶ as well as the continuous fear of eviction,⁹⁹⁷ displaced families in the KIS-sites have reportedly been faced with a precarious living situation.⁹⁹⁸ They have purportedly faced the risk of

⁹⁸⁴ Metcalfe, V., Haysom, S. and Martin, E., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 8; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 3; Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)
⁹⁸⁵ IOM, DTM Afghanistan, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results Round 10 Jan-June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 6

⁹⁸⁶ Reuters, Afghans Fleeing Upsurge in Violence Face Cold Welcome in Kabul, 30 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁷ Afghanistan – Protection Cluster, Central Region Update, May 2017, 17 June 2017, [url](#), p. 1; EU Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection & ERM, IDP's Needs Assessment in Kabul Province, 25 February 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁸⁸ Bjelica, J., Afghanistan's Returning Refugees: Why Are So Many Still Landless?, AAN, 29 March 2016, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁹ NRC and Samuel Hall, Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 25, 53; Guardian (The), Pressure Builds in 'Powderkeg' Kabul as Refugees Return Home, 15 March 2018, [url](#); NRC and IDMC, Stuck in the Mud: Urban Displacement and Tenure Security in Kabul's Informal Settlements, 2019, [url](#), p. 3; Reuters, Afghans Fleeing Upsurge in Violence Face Cold Welcome in Kabul, 30 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁰ NRC and IDMC, Stuck in the Mud: Urban Displacement and Tenure Security in Kabul's Informal Settlements, 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁹¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15; WBG and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, June 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-6, 25; IDMC, A Different Kind of Pressure. The Cumulative Effects of Displacement and Return in Afghanistan, January 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁹² New Humanitarian (The), As Afghanistan's Capital Grows, Its Residents Scramble for Clean Water, 19 February 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, War, Drought, Diplomatic Rifts Deepen Afghanistan's Water Crisis, 5 May 2019, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Kabul's Unquenchable Thirst: Crisis Looms in Afghan Capital as Groundwater Reserves Run Dry, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁹³ WBG and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, June 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-6, 25; IOM, DTM Afghanistan, Community Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results Round 10 Jan-June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2021, 19 December 2020, [url](#), p. 78

⁹⁹⁴ Reuters, Afghans Fleeing Upsurge in Violence Face Cold Welcome in Kabul, 30 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan, Afghanistan 2018 - 2021, 9 January 2021, [url](#), p. 98

⁹⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Central Region - Inter-Agency Cluster Coordination Team Meeting - Meeting Summary, 21 July 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁹⁷ NRC and IDMC, Stuck in the Mud: Urban Displacement and Tenure Security in Kabul's Informal Settlements, 2019, [url](#), pp. 2-3, 8, 10-13, 16; NRC and IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement - Grid 2019, May 2019, [url](#), pp. 35, 94; IDMC, Contribution to the Upcoming Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing on COVID-19 and Housing, June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁹⁹⁸ NRC and IDMC, Stuck in the Mud: Urban Displacement and Tenure Security in Kabul's Informal Settlements, 2019, [url](#), p. 11

being forced into secondary displacement⁹⁹⁹ and negative coping strategies like child labour¹⁰⁰⁰ and early marriage.¹⁰⁰¹ In 2019, the Afghan Land Authority Arazi, in cooperation with UN Habitat, has started a registration project of Kabul's KIS-sites,¹⁰⁰² adding to a growing database of city areas being formalised. Residents from several of Kabul's informal settlements reported on signs of change, with their living areas slowly becoming more developed and organised.¹⁰⁰³

Apart from internal displacement due to conflict, Kabul City has seen large flows of Afghan refugees returning from neighbouring countries (Pakistan and Iran) or from Turkey.¹⁰⁰⁴ Many returnees have ended up in the capital because of relatively higher security than in their regions of origin¹⁰⁰⁵ and because of expectations of more job opportunities, better support services and prospects of social acceptance.¹⁰⁰⁶ Few tensions have been reported, but an increased pressure on local resources, jobs, services, and facilities that feeds fear among both returnees and host communities has been outlined.¹⁰⁰⁷ Most returnees in Kabul City depend on relatives for accommodation and other in-kind support.¹⁰⁰⁸ The importance of social networks has been reported as vital. When originally not from Kabul and without a safety net or extended family in the capital, returnees have faced difficulties supporting themselves, finding jobs or renting accommodation. Hazara returnees coming to Kabul have reportedly been able to count on better support, through a range of sophisticated social networks within their well-organised and cohesive community.¹⁰⁰⁹

Data from the Housing Land and Property Taskforce (HLP-TF), published in UNOCHA's Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) for 2021, reportedly suggest that in Kabul 'at least 50 per cent of people living in IDP and returnee settlements have resided in their settlements for 5 years or more'.¹⁰¹⁰ The risk of recruitment of IDPs or inhabitants of informal settlements in Kabul by AGEs¹⁰¹¹ and the possible radicalisation of returnees and people deported from Europe has been reported in recent

⁹⁹⁹ NRC and IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement - Grid 2019, May 2019, [url](#), pp. 35, 94; IDMC, Contribution to the Upcoming Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing on COVID-19 and Housing, June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁰⁰ Reuters, Life in Kabul's Squatter Camps Highlights Challenge for Any Afghan Peace, 15 February 2019, [url](#); NRC and IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement - Grid 2019, May 2019, [url](#), p. 36

¹⁰⁰¹ NRC and IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement - Grid 2019, May 2019, [url](#), p. 36

¹⁰⁰² According to an expert of Afghanistan, interviewed by the Finnish Immigration Service while on Fact Finding Mission in Kabul in April 2019. Finland, FIS, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁰⁰³ Guardian (The), 'There is Less Fear': Restoration of Kabul Repairs the Ravages of War, 13 May 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁴ IOM interviewed by the Finnish Immigration Service while on Fact Finding Mission in Kabul in April 2019. Finland, FIS, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 11; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 82; Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7; New York Times (The), Fresh from Iran's Coronavirus Zone, Now Moving across Afghanistan, 26 March 2020, [url](#); New Humanitarian (The), As Deportations Soar, Afghan Returnees Struggle on Home Soil, 26 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁵ WBG and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, June 2019, [url](#), p. 6; New Humanitarian (The), As Deportations Soar, Afghan Returnees Struggle on Home Soil, 26 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁶ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility. Exploring the Link Between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 23; MMC, Distant Dreams. Understanding the Aspirations of Afghan Returnees, January 2019, [url](#), p. 31; Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan Returnees - 2018, 14 May 2019, [url](#), p. 106; WBG and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, June 2019, [url](#), pp. 6, 16, 22

¹⁰⁰⁷ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility. Exploring the Link Between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 21-24

¹⁰⁰⁸ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility. Exploring the Link Between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), p. 23; MMC, Distant Dreams. Understanding the Aspirations of Afghan Returnees, January 2019, [url](#), pp. 33, 39-40

¹⁰⁰⁹ Sources cited by the Finnish Immigration Service. Finland, FIS, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 12, 25-26

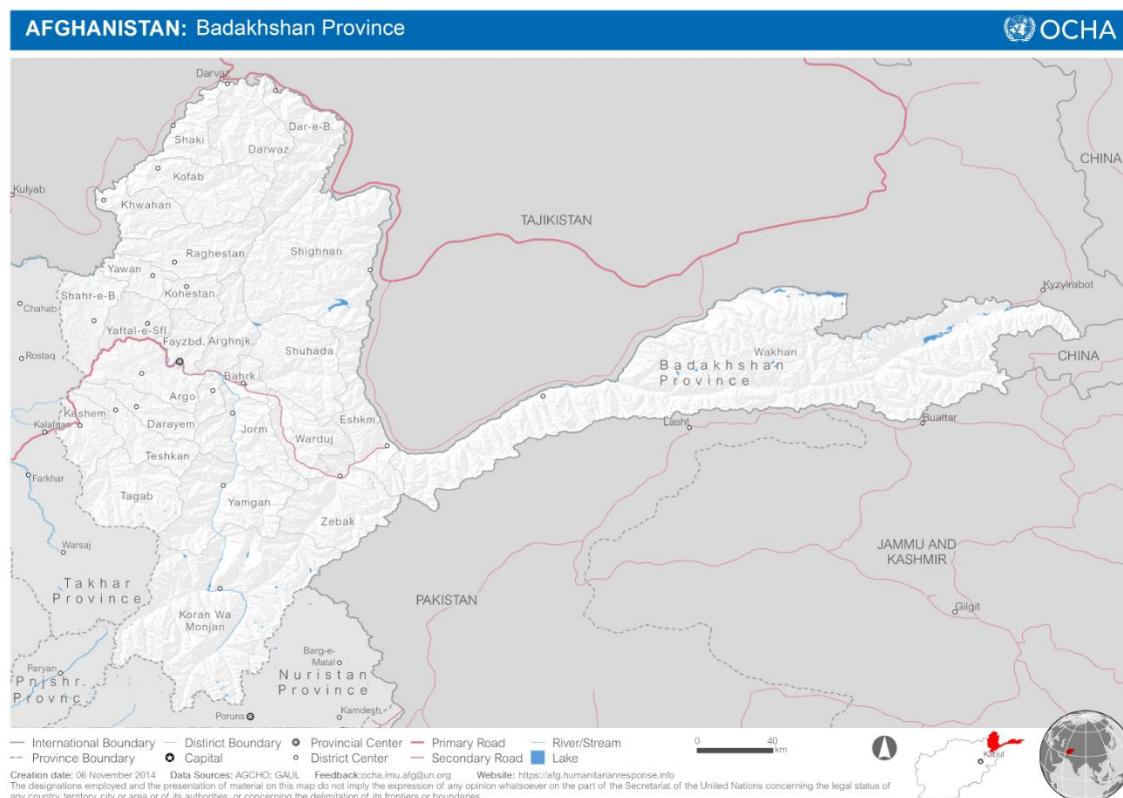
¹⁰¹⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2021, 19 December 2020, [url](#), pp. 98-99

¹⁰¹¹ Guardian (The), 'There is Less Fear': Restoration of Kabul Repairs the Ravages of War, 13 May 2019, [url](#); NRC and ACAPS, Displacement and Access in Afghanistan: Scenarios, June 2019, [url](#), p. 11; Al Jazeera, 'Poor People's Eid': How Kabul IDPs Welcomed Muslim Celebration, 12 August 2019, [url](#)

years.¹⁰¹² According to reporting from UNOCHA and Amnesty International (AI), overcrowding, precarious living conditions and a lack of access to water and hygiene bring Kabul's informal settlements to a high health risk from COVID-19. Additionally, a rising trend in malnutrition has been reported in the settlements, since the onset of the pandemic and the resulting economic downturn.¹⁰¹³

2.2 Badakhshan

2.2.1 General description of the province



Map 2: Afghanistan – Badakhshan province, source: UNOCHA¹⁰¹⁴

Badakhshan province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan, and is divided into the following districts: Arghanjkhwah, Argo, Baharak, Darayem, Darwaz-Payin (Maymay), Darwaz-e-Balla (Nesay), Eshkashim, Fayzabad, Jorm, Keshem, Khash, Khwahan, Kofab, Kohestan, Koran wa Munjan, Raghestan, Shahr-e-Buzurg, Shighnan, Shaki, Shuhada, Tagab, Teshkan, Wakhan, Warduj, Yaftal-e-Sufila, Yamgan (Girwan), Yawan, and Zebak.¹⁰¹⁵ Most of the province is mountainous. The provincial capital is Fayzabad.¹⁰¹⁶

¹⁰¹² DW, Deported Afghans at Risk of Radicalization: Study, 26 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰¹³ AI, Afghanistan's Four Million Internally Displaced People - A Glance into Their Lives of Poverty and Displacement during the Pandemic, 19 August 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2021, 19 December 2020, [url](#), p. 93; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan Afghanistan 2018 - 2021, 9 January 2021, [url](#), p. 36

¹⁰¹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Badakhshan Province- District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁵ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 26-27

¹⁰¹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Badakhshan province, n.d., [url](#)

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1 035 658, of which 75 577 live in the provincial capital, Fayzabad.¹⁰¹⁷

The main ethnic groups in the province are Tajiks and Uzbeks.¹⁰¹⁸

The province is served by Fayzabad airport, located some 12 kilometres west of Fayzabad city.¹⁰¹⁹ As of February 2021, scheduled passenger services between Fayzabad and Kabul were not available.¹⁰²⁰

Infrastructure in Badakhshan has been described as 'almost non-existent'¹⁰²¹, with one main road 'from Fayzabad heading to the east and to the west', while the 'majority of districts' are 'unreachable for all types of vehicles'.¹⁰²² Infrastructure projects that have been completed in the recent past or are ongoing include the construction of the Baharak-Eshkashim transit road, connecting Afghanistan with Tajikistan and China¹⁰²³, the repair of the 103-kilometre Fayzabad - Keshem main road¹⁰²⁴, or the reconstruction of the road connecting Fayzabad city to Yawan district.¹⁰²⁵ Access to remote districts such as Wakhan is not available during the winter, as 'snow cuts the region off from the rest of Afghanistan for months'.¹⁰²⁶

2.2.2 Conflict background and actors in Badakhshan

A 2017 AAN report stated that, although Badakhshan province 'was never conquered when the Taliban were in power in the 1990s', the province produced 'hundreds of Taliban fighters' at that time. Subsequently, in 2004 the Taliban began recruiting locally in Badakhshan, a strategy that reportedly 'accelerated from 2012 onwards'. The same source further highlights the fact that, since 2015 the Taliban have become increasingly successful in the province.¹⁰²⁷

According to the 2020 UNODC opium survey, poppy was still cultivated in Badakhshan, and an increase of 36 % in the area used for opium poppy cultivation was recorded, compared to the previous year,¹⁰²⁸ while the province also served a drug production and trafficking zone.¹⁰²⁹ Due to the remoteness of the area, the Taliban have created bases for smuggling networks and financial operations in the north-east of the country, including in Badakhshan.¹⁰³⁰ A July 2020 RFE/RL/Gandhara report claimed that Badakhshan was 'one of the main heroin production hubs for Central Asia'.¹⁰³¹

¹⁰¹⁷ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-20, 18 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 3, 22

¹⁰¹⁸ Afghanistan, MRRD, Provincial Profile – Badakhshan, 2006, [url](#), p. 1; Ali O. and Ruttig, T., Elections 2014 (22): How disenchantment with General Dostum split the Uzbek vote bank, AAN, 22 May 2014, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁹ Afghanistan, ACAA, Aeronautical Information Publication, 5 November 2020, [url](#), p. 137

¹⁰²⁰ KamAir, Route Map, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰²¹ AKF, Reconnecting Afghan & Tajik Badakhshan: economic development in the cross-border region, 19 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰²² LCA, Afghanistan Road Network, updated in September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰²³ Ariana News, Multimillion Dollar Road Project Launched in North of Afghanistan, 13 May 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁴ EZ Afghanistan, 1.2 Million People Benefit from Repaired Road in Badakhshan, 12 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁵ EZ Afghanistan, Road Reconstruction in Feyzabad District, Badakhshan to Benefit 690,000 People, 3 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁶ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Cold, Hunger, And Disease Wreak Havoc In Afghanistan's 'Rooftop' Community, 25 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁷ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taliban of the North (1): A case study from Badakhshan, AAN, 3 January 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁸ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey, 3 May 2021, [url](#), p. 9; RFE/RL/Gandhara, With Schools Shut, Afghan Children Work The Poppy Fields, 14 July 2020, [url](#); UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2019, 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 11; UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁰²⁹ AREU, Evolving Terrain: Opium Poppy Cultivation in Balkh and Badakhshan Provinces in 2013, February 2014, [url](#), p. 24; UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁰³⁰ Washington Post (The), In Afghanistan's northeast, fears of a Taliban return, 19 October 2019, [url](#). The article is only available on pressreader.com

¹⁰³¹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Police Raid Heroin Labs In 'Dangerous' Badakhshan Province, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

Moreover, Badakhshan province is rich in mineral resources.¹⁰³² In May 2020, the UN reported that the Taliban had lost control over certain mineral mines in the province,¹⁰³³ while in late July 2020, fighting took place between the security forces and the Taliban over a lapis lazuli mine in the Koran wa Munjan district.¹⁰³⁴

Another revenue source for the Taliban is the taxation of illegal gold mining. According to a May 2020 UN report, 'Taliban taxation and extortion connected to gold mining in Raghestan district was yielding monthly revenue of \$200 000.'¹⁰³⁵ In August 2020, Badakhshan's governor claimed that the Taliban were raising 'tens of thousands of dollars every month from Badakhshan's gold mines, which are mostly concentrated in the Raghestan and Yaftal-e Sufla districts'.¹⁰³⁶

At the end of March 2020, the Taliban published pictures of fighters training at the Abu Ubaidah Ibn Jarrah Training Center, located in Badakhshan. On 26 July 2020, the Taliban released a video of fighters training at the same location. According to LWJ, the footage was 'produced by Manba Al-Jihad Media, the main propaganda outlet for the Haqqani Network'.¹⁰³⁷

With regards to territory control by the Taliban, in April 2020, the districts of Warduj, Jorm, and Yamgan were considered 'Taliban strongholds' in Badakhshan, according to the governor of the province.¹⁰³⁸ As of February 2021, the Long War Journal's (LWJ) frequently updated map on Taliban control in Afghanistan indicated that Arghanjkhwah and Yamgan districts were 'Taliban-controlled', while Fayzabad, Yaftal-e Sufla, Shahr-e Buzurg, Kofab, Yawan, Khwahan, and Wakhan districts were assessed as 'government-controlled'. The remaining districts in Badakhshan province were described as 'contested'. More recently, as of 25 May 2021, Arghanjkhwah and Yamgan districts remained 'Taliban-controlled', while Fayzabad, Kofab, Khwahan, and Wakhan districts were assessed as 'government-controlled'. The remaining districts in Badakhshan province were described as 'contested'.¹⁰³⁹ A survey by Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021 designated 72.57 % of Badakhshan's territory under government control, 23 % under Taliban control, and 4.43 % controlled by neither side. According to the same survey, 764 966 of Badakhshan's inhabitants lived in areas under government control, 242 440 of the province's population lived in areas under Taliban control and 46 681 of Badakhshan's residents lived in areas controlled by neither side.¹⁰⁴⁰

¹⁰³² Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Badakhshan districts may fall to Taliban: Senators, 22 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Captives or Defectors? Taliban Fighters Tell Conflicting Tales, 7 November 2019, [url](#); New York Times (The), A Desperate Battle, and a Victory for Now, at a Remote Afghan Outpost, updated 12 November 2020, [url](#); Samuel Hall, Review of Country Strategy Badakhshan and Takhar, October 2010, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰³³ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 46

¹⁰³⁴ Reportely, Govt And Taliban Clash Over Lapis Lazuli Mine In Badakhshan, 25 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁵ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 56

¹⁰³⁶ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Taxes Illegal Gold Mines in Northeastern Afghanistan, 24 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁷ LWJ, Taliban touts training camps 'still going on' that prepare fighters for 'war', 1 April 2020, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban again promotes its Badakhshan training camp, 27 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁸ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghans Claim Foreign Combatants Fighting Alongside Taliban In Violation Of Peace Deal, 29 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#). For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephone interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country

The ongoing presence of foreign fighters¹⁰⁴¹ such as Tajik, Uzbek, Uyghur,¹⁰⁴² and to a lesser extent Russian and Turkmen national, in Badakhshan can be traced back to 2014.¹⁰⁴³ Some of the fighters have joined groups such as Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Al Qaeda, while others such as the Uyghurs are embedded within local Taliban structures, fighting alongside Afghan AGEs.¹⁰⁴⁴ In a January 2020 report, the UN highlighted the ‘continuing activity’ in Afghanistan of fighters belonging to groups including Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), Jamaat Ansarullah, Katibat Tawhid wal Jihad (KTJ), Islamic Jihad Group (IJG), Katibat Imam al-Bukhari (KIB) and IMU, estimating that ‘approximately 400 foreign terrorist fighters from China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and elsewhere’ had been displaced by Afghan military operations from north-eastern provinces, including Badakhshan into other provinces.¹⁰⁴⁵ According to the same source, IJGs leader Ilimbek Mamatov ‘aimed ‘to create in Afghanistan a united Central Asian terrorist group under his command’. The group consists of some 250 fighters operating ‘primarily’ in four provinces, including in Badakhshan. Meanwhile, ETIM’s leadership was reportedly present in Afghanistan at that time, and some 100 fighters were located in Jorm district, while another 200 were expected to join them. According to the same UN report, ETIM was led by Abdul Haq, and was ‘coordinating its activity with IJG’.¹⁰⁴⁶

In April 2020, ‘local officials’ of Badakhshan claimed that around 400 foreign fighters belonging to various groups were ‘operating in various parts of the province, but especially in the Khastak valley of Jorm district’, as well as in Warduj and Yamgan.¹⁰⁴⁷

In May 2020, the UN confirmed the presence of IMU in the province, while highlighting that some 500 fighters belonging to ETIM were operating ‘in the north and north-east of Afghanistan, primarily in Raghestan and Warduj districts, Badakhshan, with financing based in Raghestan’.¹⁰⁴⁸ A July 2020 UN report confirmed ETIM’s presence and capacity in Badakhshan.¹⁰⁴⁹

In October 2020, after an increase in violence in the province, local security sources claimed that there were ‘more than 400 foreign fighters in Badakhshan’ in ‘close relations’ with Al Qaeda and ISIL. According to the sources, the foreign fighters had passed through Badakhshan’s Jorm and Warduj districts, and had as main aims to help the Taliban, and in the long-term, to ‘get access to Tajikistan and China’.¹⁰⁵⁰ In November 2020, after the initial capture by the Taliban of Maymay district, Afghan authorities stated that ‘the majority of the militants’ who had taken over Maymay were foreign fighters, ‘including militants from Tajikistan’, who belonged to Jamaat Ansarullah, and in response,

¹⁰⁴¹ New York Times (The), A Desperate Battle, and a Victory for Now, at a Remote Afghan Outpost, updated 12 November 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, 2 Chechen militants killed, wounded in Badakhshan artillery strikes, 25 March 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Badakhshan Governor Claims Taliban Has Ties with Foreign Fighters, 10 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴² RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Increasing Presence In Remote Afghan Region Bordering China, 12 February 2018, [url](#); Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁰⁴³ Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁰⁴⁴ Callahan, T. and Marty, F.J., Tilting at Windmills: Dubious US claims of targeting Chinese Uyghur militants in Badakhshan, AAN, 19 March 2018, [url](#); Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁰⁴⁵ UN Security Council, Twenty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/53, 20 January 2020, [url](#), paras. 57, 60, 62

¹⁰⁴⁶ UN Security Council, Twenty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/53, 20 January 2020, [url](#), paras. 60, 62

¹⁰⁴⁷ Tolonews, Daesh, Affiliated Groups on Rise in Badakhshan: Officials, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁸ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 88

¹⁰⁴⁹ UN Security Council, Twenty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/717, 23 July 2020, 23 July 2020, [url](#), para. 67

¹⁰⁵⁰ Tolonews, 22 Districts in Badakhshan Face Security Threats: Official, 16 October 2020, [url](#)

the Tajik authorities deployed additional troops to reinforce the border.¹⁰⁵¹ In December 2020, Badakhshan authorities stated that ‘the number of foreign fighters in the province’ had ‘significantly increased’ up to around ‘450 foreign insurgents’, who were fighting together with the Taliban. According to Badakhshan’s deputy governor, the foreign fighters belonged to ‘Jamaat Ansarullah of Tajikistan, ETIM, Chinese Uyghurs, Uzbekistan and Islamic Emirate of Caucasus’, and their ‘main centres’ were Warduj and Jorm districts.¹⁰⁵²

With regards to Al Qaeda, a 2019 UN report highlighted that the group was trying to strengthen its presence in Badakhshan, in particular in Shignan district.¹⁰⁵³ In May 2020, the UN reported that Al Qaeda remained ‘covertly active’ with between 400-600 operatives present in 12 Afghan provinces, including in Badakhshan.¹⁰⁵⁴ In February 2021, the UN estimated that the capacity of ‘Al Qaeda and its affiliates’ in Afghanistan was between 200-500 members, spread across at least 11 Afghan provinces, including Badakhshan.¹⁰⁵⁵

Regarding the presence of ISKP in Badakhshan, by the end of 2016 the province was reportedly less affected by actions of the group when compared to neighbouring provinces Kunduz and Takhar.¹⁰⁵⁶ In 2019, small pockets of ISKP fighters were reported in Badakhshan.¹⁰⁵⁷ In July 2020, the UN pointed out the presence of ISKP in Afghanistan at that time, and stated that, at that time, the group could be expected to retreat to ‘Badakhshan and other northern provinces’ in case of ‘further military pressure’ on its fighters in Kunar province.¹⁰⁵⁸ On 15 May 2020, three members of a pro-government militia ‘were wounded by an IS-planted IED’ in Jorm district.¹⁰⁵⁹

In terms of the presence of government security forces, a July 2019 SIGAR report stated that Badakhshan province was at that time under the responsibility of the 217th ANA corps. ANA’s 20th Division, previously under the ANA 209th Corps, was reassigned in April 2019 to become a new corps, the 217th Corps.¹⁰⁶⁰ Badakhshan province also remains included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan.¹⁰⁶¹

2.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 186 civilian casualties (59 killed and 127 injured) in Badakhshan province, a 75 % increase compared to 2019, when 106 civilian casualties (48 deaths and 58 injured)

¹⁰⁵¹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Dushanbe Reinforces Border After Tajik Militants Appear In Video Fighting In Afghanistan, 17 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵² Pajhwok Afghan News, Badakhshan: ‘Hundreds of aliens fight in Taliban ranks’, 9 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵³ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, S/2019/481, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁰⁵⁴ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 33

¹⁰⁵⁵ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), para. 64

¹⁰⁵⁶ Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁰⁵⁷ National (The), ISIS recruitment is growing in Afghanistan as US and Taliban work for peace, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁸ UN Security Council, Twenty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/717, 23 July 2020, [url](#), para. 60

¹⁰⁵⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badakhshan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 78

¹⁰⁶¹ NATO, Resolute Support: Train Advise Assist Command – North, accessed 22 March 2021, [url](#)

were recorded. In 2020 the leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted killings and non-suicide IEDs; this represented a change in tactics or causes compared to 2019, when the leading causes of casualties were air strikes, followed by ground engagements and targeted killings.¹⁰⁶²

Between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data on 200 violent events in Badakhshan province, of which: 147 were coded as battles, 41 were coded as explosions/remote violence, and 12 were coded as violence against civilians.¹⁰⁶³

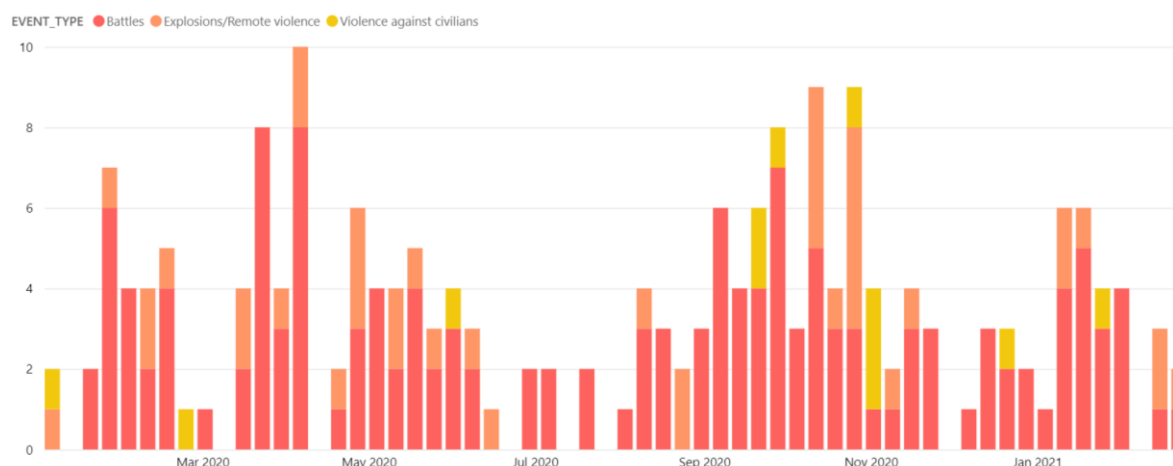


Figure 4: Badakhshan province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁰⁶⁴

¹⁰⁶² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹⁰⁶³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badakhshan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badakhshan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

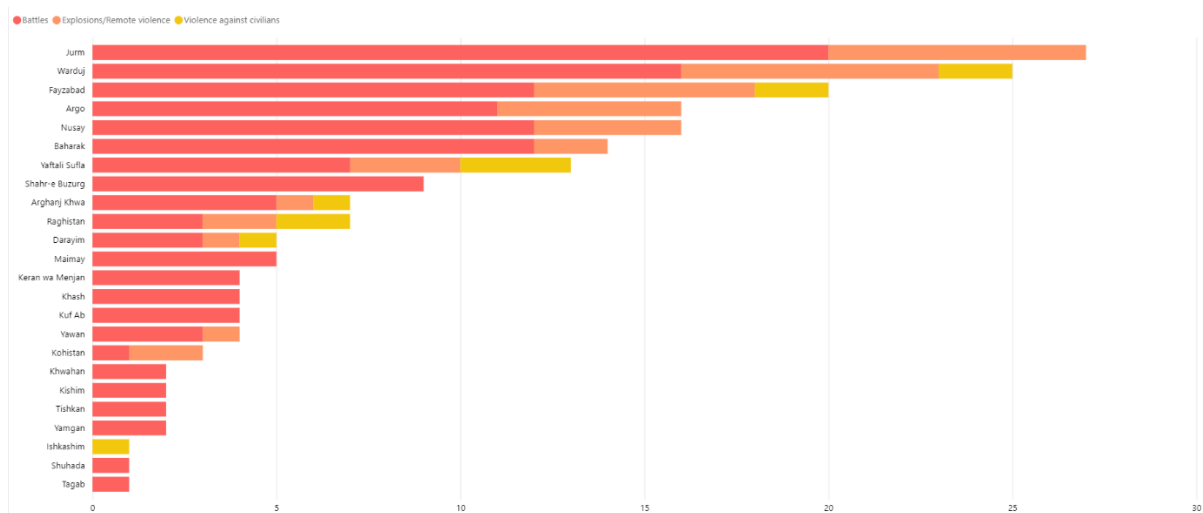


Figure 5: Badakhshan province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁰⁶⁵

Of the battles, 131 events were coded as armed clashes, while 16 events recorded change in territory control. With regards to armed clashes, the majority (some 78 %) were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police or military personnel, and members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis*¹⁰⁶⁶ (the term '*arbaki*' is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias¹⁰⁶⁷). Meanwhile, around 20 % of armed clashes were attacks launched by the Afghan security forces together with pro-government militias against the Taliban, while around 2 % of armed clashes were attributed by ACLED to unidentified armed groups.¹⁰⁶⁸ In April 2020, operations and attacks were carried out by Afghan security forces in Jorm, Warduj and Nesay districts.¹⁰⁶⁹ On 27 September 2020, the Taliban 'launched a massive offensive'¹⁰⁷⁰, reportedly targeting 24 of Afghanistan's provinces¹⁰⁷¹, and Badakhshan was 'especially targeted'.¹⁰⁷² On 16 October 2020, after an increase in violence, the governor of the province stated that, at that time, 22 of the province's districts were facing 'security threats by the Taliban'.¹⁰⁷³ In November 2020, 'intense fighting' was reported in Shuhada and Yafal-e Sufia districts.¹⁰⁷⁴ On 22 November 2020, upper house members of Badakhshan stated that the 'security situation of the province had worsened', while warning that Badakhshan was 'on the brink of collapse, particularly six districts which share border with Tajikistan'.¹⁰⁷⁵

¹⁰⁶⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badakhshan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 6 battles in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

¹⁰⁶⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badakhshan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁷ AAN, Enemy Number One: How the Taleban deal with the ALP and uprising groups, 19 July 2018, [url](#); HRW, "Just Don't Call It a Militia" Impunity, Militias, and the "Afghan Local Police", 4 September 2011, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁰⁶⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badakhshan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Tens of rebels killed in Badakhshan, 11 April 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 27 Taliban killed in Badakhshan airstrikes: MoD, 11 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁰ Sukhankin, S., Central Asia's Specter of Insecurity: The View from Badakhshan to Fergana, The Jamestown Foundation, 20 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷¹ South Asia Monitor, Taliban attacks 24 Afghan provinces in a day, 28 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷² Jamestown Foundation (The), Central Asia's Specter of Insecurity: The View from Badakhshan to Fergana, 20 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷³ Tolonews, 22 Districts in Badakhshan Face Security Threats: Official, 16 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (2 – 8 November 2020, 11 November 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Badakhshan districts may fall to Taliban: Senators, 22 November 2020, [url](#)

On 18 January 2021, the Taliban attacked a security checkpoint in Pul-e Soch in Jorm district¹⁰⁷⁶, and on 21 January 2021 several 'security and defence checkpoints' were attacked in Warduj district.¹⁰⁷⁷

With regards to the recorded changes in territory control, some of the incidents include: on 28 March 2020, the Taliban managed to retake control of Yamgan district¹⁰⁷⁸ and of some villages in Jorm district, inflicting casualties on Afghan security forces there.¹⁰⁷⁹ On 18 October 2020, Taliban fighters took control over 'parts of Faizabad city'.¹⁰⁸⁰ Maimay 'strategic district'¹⁰⁸¹ was captured by the Taliban on 19 November 2020¹⁰⁸², however on 21 November 2020 it was reported that the Afghan security forces had retaken the district.¹⁰⁸³ On 20 January 2021, the Taliban launched an attack and reportedly gained control of seven villages in Argo district.¹⁰⁸⁴

There were 41 incidents of explosions/remote violence recorded by ACLED in Badakhshan province during the reference period. Of those, 23 were attributed to the Afghanistan security forces, 14 to the Taliban, two to unidentified armed groups, and one each to ISKP and to the NATO forces.¹⁰⁸⁵ On 5 June 2020, some 11 members of the ALP 'were killed in a roadside bomb blast' in Khash district.¹⁰⁸⁶ Between 30 November – 6 December 2020, 'three civilians were reportedly killed by an unexploded ordnance (UXO) detonation in Argo district'.¹⁰⁸⁷ On 20 December 2020, 'two civilians were reportedly killed by an IED in Baharak district'.¹⁰⁸⁸ Between 15 – 21 February 2021, 'two children were wounded by an IED detonation in Argo district'.¹⁰⁸⁹

Of the 12 incidents of violence against civilians, 6 were perpetrated by the Afghanistan security forces, 3 by the Taliban, and 3 by unidentified armed groups or pro-government militia.¹⁰⁹⁰ On 30 May 2020 in Warduj district, armed Taliban men abducted 13 civilians to their base in a village, where they 'severely beat' some of the abductees, and 'subjected one of them to electric shocks'. The reported reason for the punishment was the fact that the civilians had 'allegedly assisted' the Afghan National Army.¹⁰⁹¹ On 1 June 2020, four civilians were shot by the Taliban in 'in the Shewa area in the Arghanchkhah district'.¹⁰⁹² In August 2020, a media report highlighted extortion,

¹⁰⁷⁶ AVA, Taliban ambush security checkpoint in Badakhshan, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁷ Bakhtar News, Taliban Attack Repulsed in Badakhshan, 21 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Yamgan district falls to Taliban after fierce fighting, 28 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁹ New York Times (The), Taliban Attack Afghanistan Amid Growing Coronavirus Threat, 28 March 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Takes District Headquarters, Says It Will Not Negotiate With Afghan Government Team, 28 March 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 March to 29 March 2020, 1 April 2020, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 March – 5 April 2020, 9 April 2020, [url](#), p. 1; Afghanistan Times, Rampant insecurity wreaks havoc in Badakhshan, 6 April 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 bases fall 32 security personnel go missing, 28 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁰ Afghanistan Times, Taliban overrun outskirts of Faizabad, 18 October 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, PD8 Of Faizabad City Falls Under Taliban Influence, 18 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸¹ Tolonews, Taliban Overrun Strategic District in Badakhshan, 19 November 2020, [url](#);

¹⁰⁸² Southasian Monitor, Taliban Launched Attacks In 23 Provinces In Last 24 Hours: MOD, 21 November 2020, [url](#);

Tolonews, Taliban Overrun Strategic District in Badakhshan, 19 November 2020, [url](#);

¹⁰⁸³ MENAFM, Afghanistan- Badakhshan's Maimay district fully cleared of Taliban, 22 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Badakhshan police poised to recapture villages, 21 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badakhshan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁶ Tolonews, 11 Afghan Local Police Killed in Badakhshan Blast: Official, 6 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 November – 6 December 2020, 10 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁸⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 – 27 December 2020, 27 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (15 – 21 February 2021, 24 February 2021, [url](#), p.2

¹⁰⁹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badakhshan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report: 1 January-30 June 2020, July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁰⁹² Ariana News, Taliban gunned down four civilians in Badakhshan: official, 2 June 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Taliban rebels shoot dead four in Badakhshan, 1 June 2020, [url](#)

harassment and 'killing of travellers' by Taliban on roads in Badakhshan.¹⁰⁹³ On 24 September 2020, five members of a family were killed in a 'Taliban ambush' in Patawak village of Darayem district.¹⁰⁹⁴

On 9 December 2020, 'two civilians were killed and two others were wounded at an illegal checkpoint on the road between Fayzabad to Baharak'.¹⁰⁹⁵ On 25 December 2020, two civilians were injured in Raghestan district and Yaftal-e Sufla district during ongoing fighting.¹⁰⁹⁶ On 21 January 2021, 'one civilian was killed and two women were injured by crossfire in Barlas, Bakht Shah, Deh Magas villages in Argo district'.¹⁰⁹⁷ In the first week of February 2021, one civilian was killed in Raghestan district during conflict.¹⁰⁹⁸ Between 8 and 14 February 2021, 'targeted killings, abductions and illegal checkpoints' were reported, and one civilian was reportedly wounded.¹⁰⁹⁹ In the last week of February 2021, 'a teacher reportedly was wounded due to fighting in Kohestan district'.¹¹⁰⁰

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020-28 February 2021, reporting 11 102 persons displaced from Badakhshan, of which 10 997 (some 99 %) were displaced within the province, while 105 persons were displaced to Kabul, Parwan and Panshker provinces.¹¹⁰¹ At the same time, an IOM report stated that between January and June 2020, at least 14 845 people were displaced from Badakhshan province.¹¹⁰²

By district, displacement during the reference period occurred from: Jorm (49.7% of all displacement); Warduj (37.5 %); Argo (8.4 %); Kohestan (1.8 %); Darwaz-e-Balla (1.5 %); Koran Wa Monjan (0.4 %); Shahr-e-Buzorg (0.4 %) and Baharak (0.3 %).¹¹⁰³

Some of the larger conflict-induced displacement episodes include: on 10 February 2020, around 4 158 people were displaced from Warduj district¹¹⁰⁴; on 3 April 2020, some 917 people were displaced from Jorm and on 18 April 2020, another 1 617 people were displaced from Jorm district¹¹⁰⁵; between 28 April – 4 May 2020, around 4 242 people were displaced in Jorm and Baharak districts¹¹⁰⁶. On 6 September 2020, approx. 2 051 people were displaced from Jorm;¹¹⁰⁷ on 20 September 2020, some 2 191 people were displaced in Raghestan district¹¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁹³ Salaam Times, Taliban continue extortion, killing of travellers on highways 06 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁴ Tolonews, 5 Family Members Killed in 'Taliban Ambush' in Badakhshan, 24 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 – 13 December 2020), 16 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 December 2020 – 3 January 2021), 6 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 – 24 January 2021), 27 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (1 – 7 February 2021), 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (8 – 14 February 2021), 14 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁰² IOM DTM Afghanistan: Baseline Mobility Assessment - Badakhshan Summary Results, Round 10 - Jan – Jun 2020, 6 April 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹¹⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

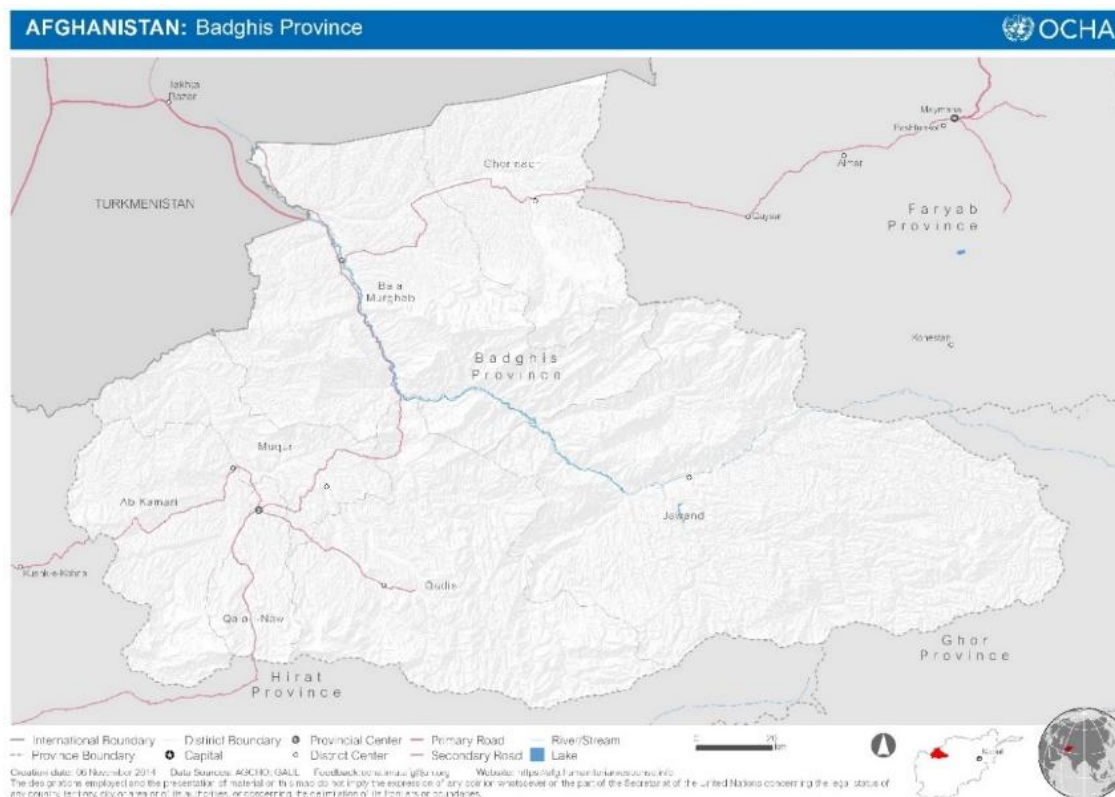
¹¹⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 April – 4 May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 – 27 September 2020, 30 September 2020, [url](#), p. 1

2.3 Badghis

2.3.1 General description of the province



Map 3: Afghanistan – Badghis province, source: UNOCHA¹¹⁰⁹

The province of Badghis is located in north-western Afghanistan¹¹¹⁰, alongside the border with Turkmenistan.¹¹¹¹ Badghis province is divided into the following districts: Ab Kamari, Bala Murghab, Ghormach, Jawand, Muqur, Qadis, and Qala-i Naw. The provincial capital is Qala-i Naw.¹¹¹² The district of Ghormach reportedly became part of Faryab province in 2017.¹¹¹³ In August 2018, the Peshawar-based daily newspaper, the Frontier Post reported that Ghormach's administrative affairs would be shifted back to Badghis due to security reasons.¹¹¹⁴ The administrative status of the district seems to be disputed. AAN cited sources claiming that the central government had already transferred Ghormach to Faryab 'temporarily' in 2007, while the governor of Faryab did not consider Ghormach to be part of Faryab in 2010.¹¹¹⁵

NSIA estimated the population of Badghis province for 2019-20 at 540 009.¹¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Badghis Province, District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Badghis province, district atlas, April 2014, n.d., [url](#); Khaama Press, 29 Taliban militants killed, wounded in separate incidents in Badghis province, 14 April 2020, [url](#)

¹¹¹¹ RFE/RL, Officials: 25 elite commandos killed in clashes with Taliban, 17 July 2019, [url](#)

¹¹¹² Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Badghis, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 41

¹¹¹³ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#); UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹¹¹⁴ Frontier Post (The), Ghormach falls to Taliban as ANA troops move to Maimana, 28 August 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁵ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁶ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2019-20, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 37

Badghis is inhabited mainly by Tajiks, Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Turkmen, ¹¹¹⁷ Baluchs and Aimaks. ¹¹¹⁸

The roads of Badghis have been reported to be in bad condition and mostly unsafe because of insurgent and criminal activity. ¹¹¹⁹ In January 2020, *Wolesi Jirga* (Lower House of the Afghan Parliament), approved two presidential decrees on obtaining a USD 100 million loan for the construction of two roads: Kabul ring road, which will cost USD 70 million and the Armak-Qala-i Naw road in Badghis that will cost USD 30 million. ¹¹²⁰ The airport in Badghis province is named Qala-i Naw Airport and is located in Qala-i Naw City, the provincial capital. ¹¹²¹ According to the Afghan Civil Aviation Authority report of November 2020, Qala-i Naw airport is located 1.60 km west of Qala-i Naw city centre. ¹¹²²

2.3.2 Conflict background and actors in Badghis

According to the provincial profile of Badghis by AAN, Badghis was the first province of northern Afghanistan to be seized by the Taliban in late 1996. ¹¹²³ After the fall of the Taliban, several influential warlords ruled Badghis, among them Abdul Malik, Rashid Dostum, Juma Khan, and Ismail Khan. ¹¹²⁴ An EU-funded Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM) household assessment report of November 2018 indicated that the security situation had worsened in Badghis in 2018 due to fighting between insurgents and government forces in Jawand and Qadis. ¹¹²⁵ Since 2014, Badghis province has been a hotbed of fighting between the Taliban, IMU and ANDSF. ¹¹²⁶ Since 2016, Badghis was amongst the western provinces witnessing clashes between Taliban factions, each loyal to a different commander. ¹¹²⁷

In October 2019, UNAMA indicated that the four western provinces of Afghanistan including Badghis, in the recent years have experienced a growing number of insurgent activities. ¹¹²⁸ According to Etilaatroz, an Afghan daily newspaper, since March 2019, Taliban fighters continued their attacks on Bala Murghab district and extended their presence into Jawand, Ab Kamari, Muqur and Qadis districts, where intense clashes continued between the group and Afghan forces. The source quoted Ziaulhaq Ferozkohi, political activist in Badghis province, stating that [informal translation] the ‘Taliban control major territory in Badghis province including and entirely Bala Murghab District and its capital. Residents left the district, and only military outposts remained. The government control only the capitals of Qadis, Ab Kamari and Muqur Districts.’ According to the source, a security in-charge for Badghis, who did not want to be named, stated that [informal translation] ‘Taliban have been collecting 500 AFG (around 5 Euros) per month per family, and the group monopolised the pistachio farms’. The source also quoted Sharifullah Chamtoo, Badghis chief police, stating [informal translation] ‘all districts of Badghis province are under the government

¹¹¹⁷ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Badghis, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁸ NPS, Program for culture and conflict studies, Badghis province overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹¹⁹ AREU, The Political Economy of Education and Health Service Delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016, [url](#), pp. 44-46; Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

¹¹²⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Decrees on \$100m loan for 2 projects approved, 6 January 2020, [url](#)

¹¹²¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Badghis province, district atlas, April 2014, n.d., [url](#); Great Circle Mapper, All countries, Afghanistan, Badghis province, Qala-i-Naw airport, 5 June 2020, [url](#)

¹¹²² Afghanistan, ACAA, Aeronautical Information Publication, 5 November 2020, [url](#), p. 435

¹¹²³ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

¹¹²⁴ US Naval Postgraduate School, Badghis Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹²⁵ ERM, Household Assessment Report, 1 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹²⁶ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹²⁷ Strategy Page, Afghanistan: Perpetual Pressure On Pakistan, 13 March 2018, [url](#)

¹¹²⁸ UNAMA, Badghis leaders strategize on stronger measures to protect children in armed conflict, 5 October 2019, [url](#)

control.¹¹²⁹ On 30 November 2020, Kabul News indicated that Bala Murghab was one of the most insecure districts of Badghis province, where the Taliban controlled 'swaths of territories'.¹¹³⁰ In December 2019, Taliban issued a statement claiming that they had taken the control of Bala Murghab district capital¹¹³¹ and in March 2020, a local news quoted Najmulddin Burhani the spokesman for Badghis Governor stating that Rubat area of Qadis district was under the Taliban control.¹¹³²

On 4 May 2020, Taliban reported that several of *Mujahideen* (Taliban fighters) were graduated from *Saad Ben Abi Weqaas* military training camp in Badghis province. The group posted several photos of the alleged fighters during the training.¹¹³³ During the same period, UN Security Council report indicated that Qari Mohammad Ayub Noorzai was Taliban's shadow governor for Badghis province.¹¹³⁴

On 20 May 2020, Salaam Times reported that the Taliban blocked roads to the districts of Badghis and prevented local people, government and health workers to enter Bala Murghab, Jawand and Qadis districts.¹¹³⁵

In August 2020, Tolonews reported that the Taliban controlled the Herat-Badghis highway and closed roads that linked several districts to Qala-i Naw, the provincial capital of Badghis province.¹¹³⁶ In September 2020, the latter source indicated that ANDSF pushed out the Taliban from the mentioned highway and cited Badghis provincial council indicating that the threat was still present on the Herat-Badghis highway.¹¹³⁷ In December 2020, public uprising forces were reportedly present on Herat-Badghis highway, where they allegedly extorted money from the people.¹¹³⁸

In November 2020, Mullah Amin, also known as Khadim, a Taliban shadow district governor for Ab Kamari district of Badghis province was reportedly killed in an airstrike by ANDSF in Coak-Chail area of Ab Kamari.¹¹³⁹

A survey conducted by Pajhwok Afghan News from November 2020 until February 2021¹¹⁴⁰ designated 28.71 % of Badghis' territory under government control, 71.29 % under Taliban control. According to the same survey, 157 809 of Badghis' inhabitants lived in areas under government control, 391 774 of the province's population lived in areas under Taliban control. During the same period, Ghormach district and its centre were entirely under the Taliban control.¹¹⁴¹

¹¹²⁹ Etilaatroz, «بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه», 30 August 2019, [url](#)

¹¹³⁰ Kabul News, Taliban mortar strike kills senior military commander in Badghis, 30 November 2020, [url](#)

¹¹³¹ Voice of Jihad, «د تېر کال فتوحاتو ته ځغلنده کتنه», [informal translation: 'A quick look at last year's victories'], 31 December 2019, [url](#)

¹¹³² SubheKabul, «يک ځوانه د ولايت بادغيس کې خودکشی», [informal translation: 'A young girl committed suicide in Badghis Province'], 3 March 2020, [url](#)

¹¹³³ Voice of Jihad, «بادغيس: د لسگونه مجاهدين د سعد بن ابی وقاص له معسکر نه فارغ شول», [informal translation: 'Badghis: tens of Mujahideen (fighters) were graduated from Saad Ben Abi Weqaas military training camp in Badghis province'], 4 May 2020, [url](#)

¹¹³⁴ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 27

¹¹³⁵ Salaam Times, Taliban's blockade of districts in Badghis endangers thousands of lives, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

¹¹³⁶ Tolonews, Taliban control Herat-Badghis highway: locals, 19 August 2020, [url](#)

¹¹³⁷ Tolonews, Herat-Badghis highway cleaned of Taliban, 5 September 2020, [url](#)

¹¹³⁸ 8am, «مردمی» در مسیر هرات – بادغيس ادعای باج گيری «نیروهای خیزش», [informal translation: 'money extortion by 'public uprising forces' on Herat-Badghis highway'], 26 December 2020, [url](#)

¹¹³⁹ Bakhtar News Agency, Taliban shadow Governor for Ab Kamari district, Badghis killed, 28 November 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁰ For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephone interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country; Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁴¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

As of 28 February 2021, an assessment by the LWJ, presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Muqur, Bala Murghab and Ghormach districts as 'Taliban-controlled', and Ab Kamar, Qala-i Naw, Qadis and Jawand districts as 'contested' and the remaining districts as under 'GoA control or undetermined'. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Muqur district shifted from 'Taliban controlled' to 'contested'.¹¹⁴²

In February 2021, several sources reported on the presence of different militant groups in Badghis province,¹¹⁴³ including Khatiba Imam al-Bukhari (KIB), an Uzbek *Jihadist* group that is known to operate in Afghanistan¹¹⁴⁴ and has around 150 fighters, most of whom are in Badghis province.¹¹⁴⁵ And in addition to the Taliban, there are foreign fighters belonging to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Pakistani fighters¹¹⁴⁶ and members of Al-Qaeda led by Nasruddin (grandson of Osama Bin Laden) and Saifuddin Haqqani (son of Sirajuddin Haqqani), who were present in the Ghormach and Bala Murghab districts during the reporting period.¹¹⁴⁷ Bala Murghab district remained a 'major center of the armed opposition'¹¹⁴⁸ and as of beginning of March 2021, the Taliban controlled the entire district of Bala Murghab, from where the government pulled out its forces.¹¹⁴⁹ The Taliban reportedly received active support from Al-Qaeda including financial, equipment and training [such as making bombs] in Bala Murghab and Ghormach districts where the latter group [Al-Qaeda] is present and 25 of its members are in ranks of the Taliban notably in Bala Murghab district.¹¹⁵⁰

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Badghis province increased by 194 % and the province remained the second most opium poppy cultivation province after Helmand.¹¹⁵¹ On 5 February 2021, Radio Azadi quoted Noorullah Stanikzai (Deputy Director General of Geospatial Information Management) stating that based on a 1399 (2020 – 2021) year survey conducted by the Afghan Government, there has been 37 % increase in poppy cultivation in Afghanistan notably in Badghis province.¹¹⁵²

Regarding the presence of ANDSF in Badghis province, Zafar 207th Corps of ANA is responsible for the west of Afghanistan including Badghis. As part of the RS (Resolute Support) mission, Italian forces provide functionality-based security assistance to ANA 207th Corps and ANP in the west of Afghanistan including Badghis.¹¹⁵³

¹¹⁴² LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹⁴³ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 16; RFE/RL, What happened when the Taliban visited Turkmenistan, 11 February 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, Dostum, Al-Qaeda footprint seen in North of Afghanistan, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁴ LWJ, Uzbek Jihadist group congratulates Taliban for "victory" in Afghanistan, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁵ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 16

¹¹⁴⁶ RFE/RL, What happened when the Taliban visited Turkmenistan, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁷ Tolonews, Dostum, Al-Qaeda footprint seen in North of Afghanistan, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁸ RFE/RL, What happened when the Taliban visited Turkmenistan, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁹ LWJ, Afghan forces withdrawing from checkpoints, bases, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁰ Salaam Times, Taliban receive bomb making training: Afghan officials, 9 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵¹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹⁵² Azadi Radio, کشت کوکنار در افغانستان در مقایسه به سال گذشته ۳۷ درصد افزایش یافته است, [informal translation: Poppy cultivation has increased by 37 % compared to last year in Afghanistan,] 5 February 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵³ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), pp. 5

2.3.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 221 civilian casualties, including 108 killed and 113 injured in Badghis province, which represents a 37 % increase compared to 2019. The leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, targeted killings and non-suicide IEDs.¹¹⁵⁴ According to SIGAR, RS recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Badghis province during the first quarter of 2020¹¹⁵⁵, and the mentioned source recorded up to 25 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020.¹¹⁵⁶ During the second half of 2020, no RS information on civilian casualties per province was available in SIGAR quarterly reports.¹¹⁵⁷

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data from reports in open sources on 247 incidents related to insurgents in Badghis province, of which 162 were coded as 'battles', 64 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 21 as 'violence against civilians'.¹¹⁵⁸

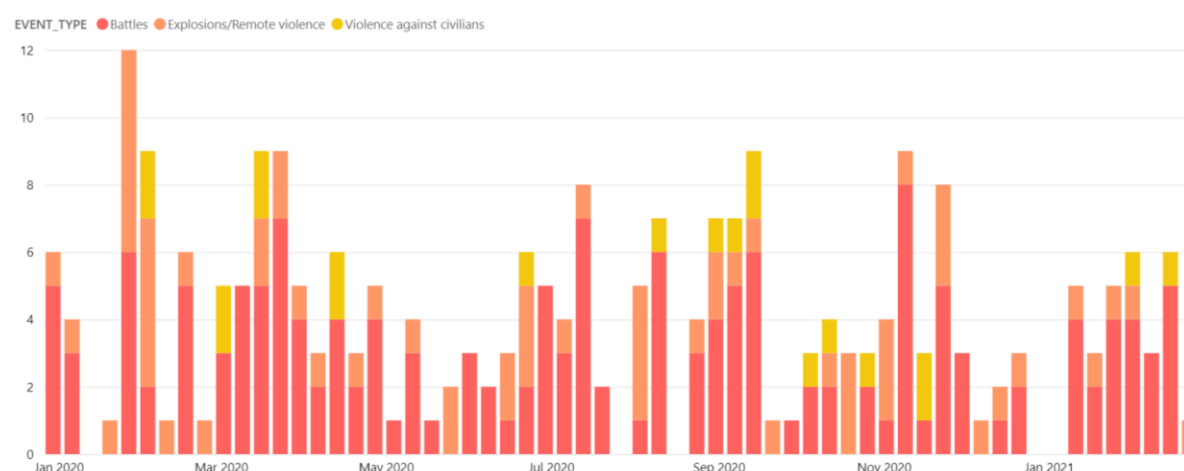


Figure 6: Badghis province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹¹⁵⁹

¹¹⁵⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

¹¹⁵⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

¹¹⁵⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹¹⁵⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badghis province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badghis province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

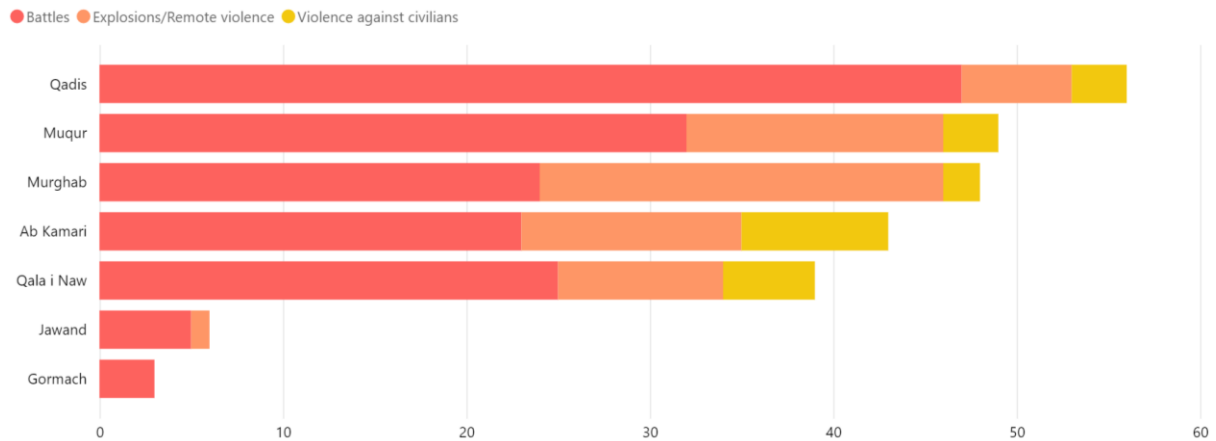


Figure 7: Badghis province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹¹⁶⁰

Regarding the battles, nearly all concerned ‘armed clashes’. The majority of these armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis* (the term *arbaki* is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias).¹¹⁶¹ Examples of such incidents included the Taliban attack on Afghan forces, where the group blocked the highway of Qadis-Qala-i Naw in April 2020¹¹⁶²; on 25 July 2020 one civilian was killed during a crossfire when the Taliban attacked an ANDSF outpost in the centre of Qadis district;¹¹⁶³ on 11 September 2020, on civilian was killed and two others were wounded during a Taliban attack on security outposts in the centre of Qadis district;¹¹⁶⁴ on 8 February 2021, clashes between Afghan security forces themselves left one civilian killed and three others wounded in Ab Kamari district. In the same district, on 20 February 2021, the Taliban shot dead one civilian.¹¹⁶⁵

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.¹¹⁶⁶ In January 2020, Afghan security forces attacked a Taliban prison in Badghis and rescued 55 ANA soldiers, four commandos, one police and two border police personnel.¹¹⁶⁷

Roadside bombs or IEDs represented around 10 % of all reported security incidents in Badghis.¹¹⁶⁸ Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. For example: on 3 January 2020, one child was killed in a roadside bomb explosion when he was looking for his sheep in the village of Na-Khod-Amodah in Qadis district¹¹⁶⁹; on 25 May 2020, three children were killed after a bomb planted by the Taliban exploded in Chashma-Dozdak village of Muqur district¹¹⁷⁰; on 15 September 2020, a roadside bomb blast killed one civilian and injured another in the First Police District of Qala-i Naw City;¹¹⁷¹ on 13 October 2020, a roadside bomb explosion killed a child and injured another when

¹¹⁶⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badghis province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 3 battles in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

¹¹⁶¹ ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badghis province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁶² Afghanistan Times, At least 12 Taliban rebels killed in Badghis, 13 April 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁶³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 30 July 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁵ New York Times (The), Afghanistan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badghis province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁷ Salaam Times, Rescued Afghan soldiers speak of appalling torture, brutality in Taliban prison, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badghis province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁷¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

their donkey stepped on the bomb planted by the Taliban in the village of Sang-e Atash in Muqur District; on 22 October 2020, two civilians were killed after a vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in Ab Kamari district;¹¹⁷² on 7 November 2020, a bomb blast in Qala-i Naw City killed 2 civilians and wounded five others;¹¹⁷³ on 20 December 2020, a bomb explosion killed 2 civilians, including one woman, and injured 3 others when their vehicle was struck by a roadside bomb in the village of Bozbayha in Muqur district. The roadside bomb was reportedly planted by the Taliban;¹¹⁷⁴ on 16 February 2021, an IED explosion killed one child and wounded another civilian in Muqur district;¹¹⁷⁵ in February 2020, Qala-i Naw City reportedly witnessed continued rocket attacks by the Taliban that injured 12 people.¹¹⁷⁶

Shelling, artillery and missile attacks by the Taliban represented 8 % of all registered incidents in Badghis.¹¹⁷⁷ For instance, on 25 April 2020, a woman was killed, and a child was wounded after a Taliban alleged mortar hit their house in the village of Kamengi Oliya in Qadis district¹¹⁷⁸; on 1 May 2020, the Taliban destroyed, in an explosion, a school in Qadis district that was recently constructed.¹¹⁷⁹ In [Bala] Murghab district, on 10 June 2020, one civilian was killed and four others were wounded by a mortar in “Deh Khoja”,¹¹⁸⁰ on 3 August 2020, four civilians, including one woman and three children, were killed and two others wounded when an ANA mortar hit their house in the centre of Bala Murghab district.¹¹⁸¹

During the reporting period, air/drone strikes represented 7 % of all registered incidents in Badghis.¹¹⁸² In June 2020, six civilians were killed and eight wounded in three separate ANDSF airstrikes in Badghis¹¹⁸³; on 27 November 2020, between 12 and 13 members of a family were killed in ANSDF airstrike in Kokchile area of Ab Kamari district.¹¹⁸⁴

ACLED categorised 8 % of all violent events recorded in Badghis as ‘violence against civilians’.¹¹⁸⁵ These incidents involved for instance: in April 2020, Taliban shot and killed one civilian driver who refused to stop his car at Taliban’s order in the village of Laman in Qala-i Naw City, the provincial capital, where the group established a checkpoint;¹¹⁸⁶ on 9 September 2020, the Taliban abducted and killed the wife of a soldier in the village of Darra-i Taimani in Qala-i Naw. The soldier reportedly worked in Ghor province; on 14 September 2020, unknown gunmen shot and killed 5 civilians including a former Afghan senator when they were traveling to Qala-i Naw City, in the village of Mobarak Shah in Aab Kamari district;¹¹⁸⁷ on 6 February 2021, the Taliban kidnapped and later killed a tribal elder in Qadis district.¹¹⁸⁸

¹¹⁷² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁷³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 26 November 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁴ New York Times (The), Afghanistan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 31 December 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (15 – 21 February 2021, 24 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁷⁶ 8am, روش جدید جنگ در بادغیس؛ مردم از راکت‌پراگنی‌های طالبان وحشت‌زده‌اند [informal translation: ‘New warfare method in Badghis, people have been terrorised by Taliban rocket attacks’], 6 February 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badghis province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁹ Salaam Times, Enemies of education: Taliban blow up newly constructed school in Badghis, 13 May 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁰ Voice of Jihad, War crimes (June 2020, 5 July 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁸¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁸² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badghis province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁸³ Voice of Jihad, War crimes (June 2020, 5 July 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁴ Voice of Jihad, War Crimes (November 2020, 10 December 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 67

¹¹⁸⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badghis province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁸ New York Times (The), Afghanistan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

The WHO did not register any attacks related to health care provision in Badghis province in 2020.¹¹⁸⁹

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data from the period 1 January – 28 February 2021, reporting 12 005 persons displaced from Badghis province, with 83 % displaced within the province itself (mainly in Qala-i Naw and Ab Kamari), 14 % displaced into Herat and the remaining 3 % displaced into Ghor and Faryab provinces. During the same period, no displacement was reported to Badghis from other provinces.¹¹⁹⁰

According to UNOCHA, security situation in the West of Afghanistan including in Badghis province remained tense and unstable in July,¹¹⁹¹ August,¹¹⁹² September,¹¹⁹³ October,¹¹⁹⁴ November¹¹⁹⁵ and December 2020¹¹⁹⁶, January¹¹⁹⁷ and February 2021¹¹⁹⁸ with continued reports of IED attacks, illegal checkpoints and military operations in Badghis, Herat, Farah and Ghor provinces. 1 250 people displaced due to conflict were assessed for humanitarian aid during the same period in Badghis and Herat provinces.¹¹⁹⁹

¹¹⁸⁹ WHO, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (1 January – 31 December 2020), 11 January 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 28 February 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 – 19 July 2020), 23 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (24 – 30 August 2020), 2 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 – 13 September 2020), 16 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (19 – 25 October 2020), 28 October 2020, [url](#), p. 2

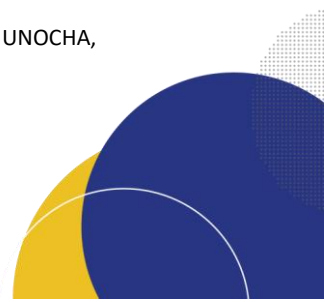
¹¹⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 – 29 November 2020), 3 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 – 20 December 2020), 23 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 – 31 January 2021), 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

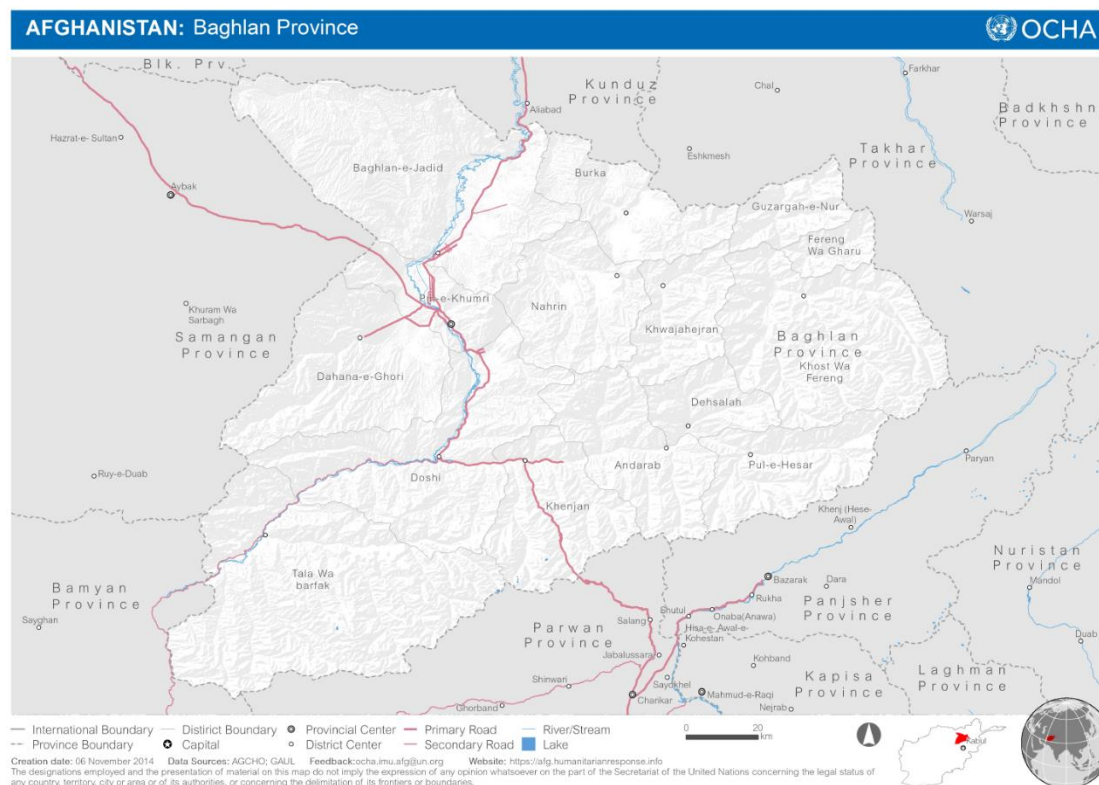
¹¹⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (8 – 14 February 2021), 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (15 – 21 February 2021), 24 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 – 31 January 2021), 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2



2.4 Baghlan

2.4.1 General description of the province



Map 4: Afghanistan – Baghlan province, source: UNOCHA¹²⁰⁰

Baghlan province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Bamiyan, Samangan, Kunduz, Takhar, Panjshir, Parwan¹²⁰¹ and Balkh.¹²⁰² Baghlan is divided into the following administrative units: Andarab, Baghlan-e Jadid (also known as Baghlan-e Markazi), Burka (Barka), Dahana-e Ghuri, Deh Salah, Doshi, Fereng wa Gharu, Guzargah-e Nur, Khenjan, Khost wa Fereng, Khwajahejran (Jalga), Nahrin, Pul-e Hesar, Pul-e Khumri, and Tala wa Barfak. The provincial capital is Pul-e Khumri.¹²⁰³

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 995 815, of which 237 888 live in the provincial capital, Pul-e Khumri.¹²⁰⁴

The main ethnic groups in the province are Tajiks, Pashtuns and Hazaras. Other ethnic groups present include Uzbeks and Tatars.¹²⁰⁵

Baghlan province is connected to eight other provinces by the Kabul-North Highway. This is the only trans-Hindukush highway in Afghanistan and the major transit route between Kabul and the north of the country, via the Salang pass.¹²⁰⁶ At the border between Baghlan and Parwan, the highway leads

¹²⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Baghlan Province, District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹²⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – North Eastern Region, District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#), pp. 32-45

¹²⁰² AIMS, AIMS Political Divisions Map, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁰³ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Baghlan, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, November 2019, [url](#), p. 14

¹²⁰⁴ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 14

¹²⁰⁵ US Naval Postgraduate School, Baghlan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁰⁶ Hewad, G., The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, AAN, 21 October 2015, [url](#); Ali, O., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

through the Salang Tunnel.¹²⁰⁷ The road in Salang is ‘temporarily closed every year winter due to snowfall, avalanches and windstorms’.¹²⁰⁸ Besides the Kabul-North Highway, Baghlan should be connected to Bamyan by December 2022 via the so-called Baghlan to Bamyan (B2B) road, according to plans by the World Bank.¹²⁰⁹ Baghlan’s capital Pul-e Khumri is known to be an economic hub.¹²¹⁰

In a conversation with Landinfo in October 2019, an international source described the stretch on Highway One between Kabul and Pul-e Khumri as sufficiently safe, including for international travellers.¹²¹¹ On the road further north, however, several incidents and road closures were reported, as AGEs draw revenue from installing checkpoints and extorting money from travellers passing through Baghlan.¹²¹² An August 2020 media report quoted a civilian source confirming that the Taliban had installed checkpoints in several areas of Baghlan and were demanding money from travellers. The same source stated that a civilian who refused to pay was shot by the Taliban.¹²¹³

2.4.2 Conflict background and actors in Baghlan

A 2016 AAN report highlighted the importance of the transport routes leading through Baghlan for the security situation of the province and elsewhere in the region, as the ANSF used ‘the roads connecting Baghlan to Samangan and Kunduz’ for ‘transporting military equipment, ammunition and reinforcements’ to northern and north-eastern provinces.¹²¹⁴ Realising the importance of controlling the Baghlan-Balkh highway, the Taliban, as early as 2016, established check points in areas such as Chashma-ye Shir, allowing them not only to demand money from travellers, but also to search vehicles and capture government security members.¹²¹⁵ Conversely, check points manned by Afghan security forces were routinely targeted by the Taliban throughout 2020, and resulted in significant number of fatalities.¹²¹⁶

The security situation in Baghlan province reportedly worsened in 2016 after the Taliban launched concerted actions against key districts near the provincial centre of Pul-e Khumri.¹²¹⁷ In spring 2018, the Afghan Ministry of Defence (MoD) admitted that the provincial capital Pul-e Khumri was threatened by the Taliban¹²¹⁸ and, by December 2018, the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) counted Baghlan among the provinces with a high Taliban presence.¹²¹⁹ In September 2019, no presidential elections took place in Dahana-e Ghuri district, due to the Taliban controlling this district¹²²⁰, although government forces re-captured the district in late October that year.¹²²¹ As of February

¹²⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Current Salang tunnel insufficient, says President Ghani, 15 October 2018, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Fixing the Salang Pass Tunnel, 21 October 2015, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Snowfall closes Salang highway for heavy traffic, 27 December 2020, [url](#); AVA, Salang highway closed for cargo trucks, 12 December 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁹ World Bank (The), Trans-Hindukush Road Connectivity Project, n.d., [url](#)

¹²¹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan administrative units, n.d., [url](#)

¹²¹¹ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22/01/2019, [url](#), p. 29;

¹²¹² Salaam Times, Taliban continue extortion, killing of travellers on highways, 6 August 2020, [url](#)

¹²¹³ Salaam Times, Taliban continue extortion, killing of travellers on highways, 6 August 2020, [url](#)

¹²¹⁴ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, [url](#)

¹²¹⁵ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, [url](#)

¹²¹⁶ News (The), Taliban kill 13 Afghan cops in Baghlan checkpoint attacks, 17 December 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghan forces killed as Taliban attacks checkpoints: Gov’t, 30 March 2020, [url](#); Xinhua, Afghan insurgency hikes as 28 including 5 civilians killed within one day, 22 December 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹²¹⁷ Khaama Press, Taliban's deputy military chief surrenders in Baghlan province, 12 August 2017, [url](#)

¹²¹⁸ Tolonews, 7 Provincial Centers Face ‘Serious Security Threats,’ 16 May 2018, [url](#)

¹²¹⁹ Tolonews, Afghan Forces To Focus On Insecure Regions In Winter, 26 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²²⁰ Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

¹²²¹ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/582-S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6; Tolonews, Baghlan’s Dahna-e-Ghuri Retaken By Security Troops: MoD, 24 October 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Around 100 Taliban militants killed, 88 arrested in Special Forces raids in Baghlan: Sources, 25 October 2019, [url](#)

2021, Long War Journal's frequently updated map on Taliban control in Afghanistan, showed Tala wa Barfak and Burka districts as 'Taliban-controlled', Andarab district as 'government-controlled' and the remaining districts in Baghlan province as 'contested'.¹²²² According to Bilal Sarwary, on 6 May 2021, Taliban took control of Burka district, which was reportedly confirmed by the Afghan officials.¹²²³ On 7 May 2021, Sarwary posted a video footage of Taliban fighters celebrating the capturing of a district (without mentioning the name) in Baghlan province.¹²²⁴ Earlier on 6 May 2021, two military bases including 60 soldiers, weapons and ammunitions were surrendered to the Taliban in central Baghlan (Baghlan-e Markazi), according to Sarwary.¹²²⁵ More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Long War Journal indicated Dahan-e Ghuri district as 'Taliban control'.¹²²⁶ At the same time, a survey by Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021¹²²⁷ designated 60 % of Baghlan's territory under government control, 33 % under Taliban control, and 7 % controlled by neither side. According to the same survey, 608 780 of Baghlan's inhabitants lived in areas under government control, 334 829 of the province's population lived in areas under Taliban control and 71 024 of Baghlan's residents lived in areas controlled by neither side.¹²²⁸

According to an AAN report from July 2016, Afghan ethnic Uzbeks set up an insurgent group called Jundullah in 2009 by splitting away from Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).¹²²⁹ While Jundullah has been affiliated with the Taliban in the past, it established itself as an independent, ISKP-allied group by taking advantage of the turmoil created by the Taliban conquest of Kunduz in September 2015. Unsympathetic towards ISKP-groups, the Taliban contained Jundullah's activities in Baghlan by 2016. According to the same report, as of July 2016, 'the threat of Daesh in the north-east – through Jundullah affiliating itself to ISKP – is neither widespread, nor immediate.'¹²³⁰ More recent reports regarding the activities of the groups in Baghlan during the reference period were not available.

According to the 2020 UNODC opium survey, poppy was still cultivated in Baghlan, and an increase of 111 % in the area used for opium poppy cultivation was recorded, compared to the previous year.¹²³¹

In terms of the presence of government security forces, a July 2019 SIGAR report stated that Baghlan province was at that time under the responsibility of the 217th ANA corps. ANA's 20th Division, which was previously under the ANA 209th Corps, was reassigned in April 2019 to become a new corps, the 217th Corps.¹²³² Baghlan province also remains included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan.¹²³³

¹²²² LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

¹²²³ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 5 May 2021, [url](#)

¹²²⁴ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 7 May 2021, [url](#)

¹²²⁵ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 6 May 2021, [url](#)

¹²²⁶ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

¹²²⁷ For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephone interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country; Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

¹²²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

¹²²⁹ Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), AAN, 15 July 2016, [url](#)

¹²³⁰ Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), AAN, 15 July 2016, [url](#)

¹²³¹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey, 3 May 2021, [url](#), p. 9; UNODC, Afghanistan opium survey 2019, 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 11

¹²³² SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 78

¹²³³ NATO, Resolute Support: Train Advise Assist Command – North, accessed 22 March 2021, [url](#)

2.4.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 253 civilian casualties (81 killed and 172 injured) in Baghlan province, a 28 % decrease compared to 2019, when 349 civilian casualties (123 killed and 226 injured) were recorded. In 2020 the leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by airstrikes and non-suicide IEDs, while in the previous year the leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted/deliberate killings and non-suicide IEDs.¹²³⁴ According to UNAMA, in 2020 Baghlan province was among the five provinces with the most civilian casualties caused by pro-government forces, as well as among the seven provinces 'with the highest number of civilian casualties from ground engagements'.¹²³⁵

Between 1 January 2020-28 February 2021, ACLED collected data on 299 violent events in Baghlan province, of which 212 were coded as battles, 70 were coded as explosions/remote violence, and 17 were coded as violence against civilians.¹²³⁶

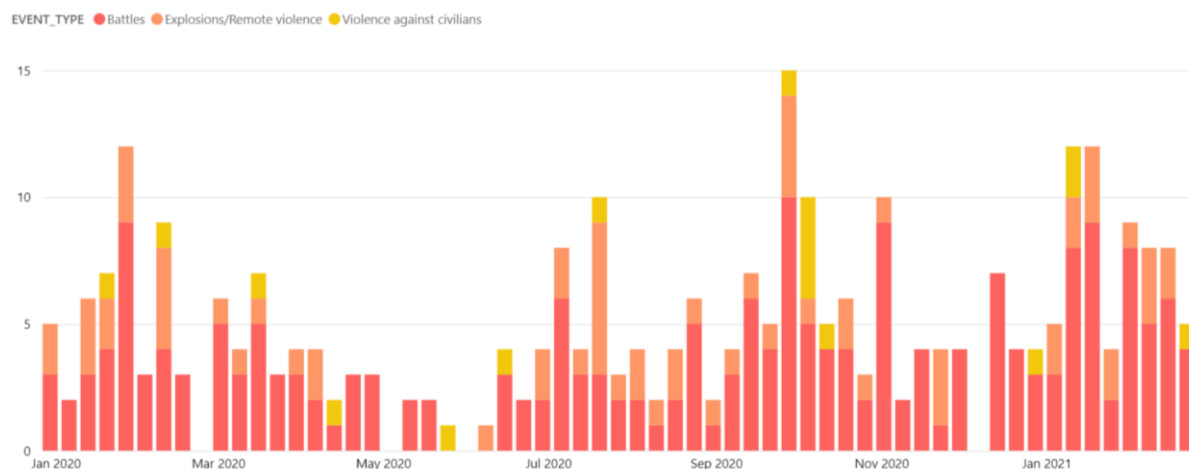


Figure 8: Baghlan province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹²³⁷

¹²³⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹²³⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 62, 72

¹²³⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Baghlan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹²³⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Baghlan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

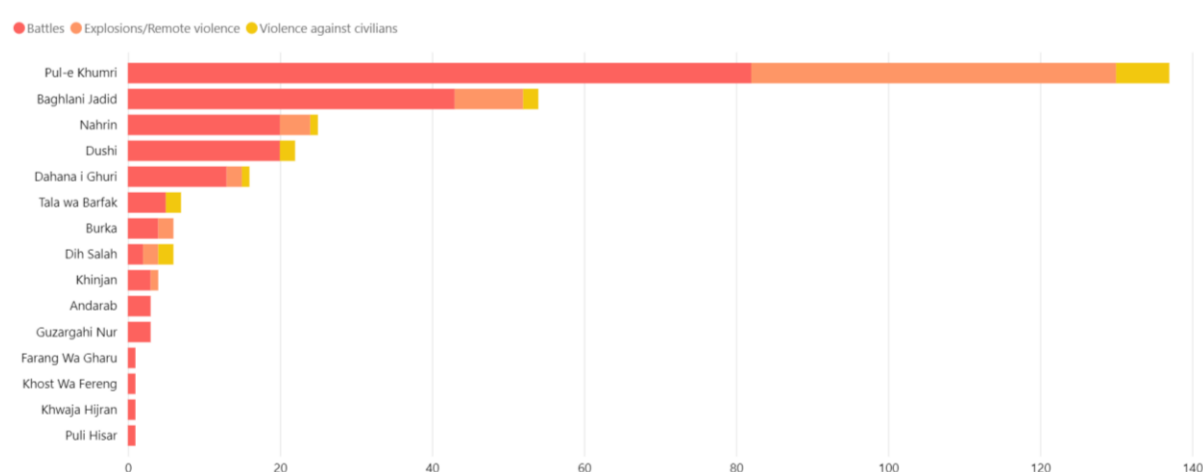


Figure 9: Baghlan province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹²³⁸

Of the battles, 201 events were armed clashes, while the remaining 11 events recorded change in control over territory. The majority of those armed clashes (some 86 %) were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police or military personnel, and members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis*¹²³⁹ (the term ‘Arbaki’ is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias¹²⁴⁰). The Taliban attacked targets including a police station in January 2020, a ‘convoy of a former member of the provincial council [...] in the Chemai Sher area of Pul-e Khumri’ on 6 August 2020, checkpoints in Guzargah-e Nur district on 14 October 2020 or security outposts in repeated attacks on 14 and 18 January 2021.¹²⁴¹

According to International Crisis Group, in July 2020, the Taliban ‘intensified attacks on major highways’ in the north, including on the Kabul-Kunduz highway in Baghlan.¹²⁴² Moreover, a July 2020 UNOCHA report stated that the ‘overall insecurity’ was ‘compounded by a rise in criminality’ while ‘the number of illegal checkpoints on main access roads’ had increased.¹²⁴³ In December 2020, International Crisis Group source reported ongoing attacks on district centres including in Baghlan, ‘despite previous self-imposed restrictions regarding reprisals in urban areas’.¹²⁴⁴

Several changes in territory control were reported during the reference period. On 30 January 2020, the Afghan security forces regained control of Guzargah-e Nur district.¹²⁴⁵ On 31 January 2020, the Taliban took over three military posts and one base in Nahrin district.¹²⁴⁶ On 26 August 2020, the Taliban gained control over ‘a large area’ of Andarab (Banu) district, while on 30 August 2020, it was reported that the Taliban had taken over ‘different parts’ of the district.¹²⁴⁷

¹²³⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Baghlan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 12 incidents (10 battles and 2 remote violence) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

¹²³⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Baghlan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁰ AAN, Enemy Number One: How the Taleban deal with the ALP and uprising groups, 19 July 2018, [url](#); HRW, “Just Don’t Call It a Militia” Impunity, Militias, and the “Afghan Local Police”, 4 September 2011, [url](#), p. 13

¹²⁴¹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch Afghanistan, accessed 1 March 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁴² International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch Afghanistan, accessed 1 March 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁴³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 July – 19 July 2020, 23 July 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹²⁴⁴ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch Afghanistan, accessed 1 March 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces retake control of Baghlan’s Guzarga Noor district, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁶ Voice of Jihad, 4 military units seized in Baghlan, 1 February 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁷ Voice of Jihad, Mujahideen take over in Baghlan, 30 August 2020, [url](#); Voice of Jihad, Local militia forced out of large area, 26 August 2020, [url](#)

On 28 October 2020, the Afghan forces regained control over 25 villages in Khost wa Fereng district.¹²⁴⁸ On 16 December 2020, it was reported that the Taliban had stormed a security base in Dahana-i Ghuri. The same source claimed that the Taliban were at that time 'in control of parts of Dahana-i Ghuri and the neighbouring Dand-e Shahabudin area'.¹²⁴⁹

There were 70 incidents of explosions/remote violence recorded by ACLED during the reference period in Baghlan province. The incidents were attributed to the Afghan security forces (27 incidents), to the Taliban (25), to unidentified armed groups (17), and to NATO forces (1).¹²⁵⁰

Airstrikes launched by the Afghan security forces and NATO forces led to civilian casualties in several instances. For instance, on 3 April 2020, two civilians were killed and six others were injured by an Afghan forces airstrike on Chashmai Shir village, Pul-e Khumri city.¹²⁵¹ On 26 August 2020, an airstrike on a school in 'the Bekzado area of central Baghlan' reportedly killed at least 10 people.¹²⁵² Shelling and missile attacks were used by the Afghan security forces, as well as by the Taliban and unidentified armed groups. Between 6 and 12 July 2020, a civilian in Arbabha village in Pul-e Khumri district was reportedly killed by a mortar.¹²⁵³ Between 23 and 29 November 2020, six civilians were injured 'during armed clashes and airstrikes in Baghlan-e-Jadid district'.¹²⁵⁴ On 21 January 2021, 'eight people were injured when a mortar shell hit a house in Pul-e Khumri'.¹²⁵⁵ Meanwhile, all incidents of remote explosions or IEDs were attributed to the Taliban or to unidentified armed groups, targeting security forces as well as civilians. On 5 August 2020, 'at least 12 people were killed in a roadside blast' in Chashmaye Shir area, along the Baghlan-Samangan highway.¹²⁵⁶ Between 23 and 29 November 2020, two civilians were killed and seven others were injured 'by an unexploded ordnance (UXO) detonation in Khenjan district'.¹²⁵⁷ On 9 January 2021, 'three people, including civilians' were killed, and five others were wounded in an IED explosion in Pul-e Khumri city.¹²⁵⁸ On 16 January 2021, 'one policeman was killed and two more were wounded in a roadside bomb blast' in Pul-e Khumri city.¹²⁵⁹ Between 18 and 24 January 2021, 'three civilians were wounded by an IED detonation in Pul-e Khumri city'.¹²⁶⁰

With regards to violence against civilians, of the 17 incidents recorded by ACLED during the reference period, 6 were attributed to the Afghanistan security forces, 6 to the Taliban and 5 to unidentified armed groups.¹²⁶¹ On 3 April 2020, two civilians were killed and six others were injured during conflict in in Pul-e Khumri district.¹²⁶² On 20 April 2020, one civilian was killed and two others were injured during airstrikes on Baghlan-e-Markazi district.¹²⁶³ On 3 May 2020, Afghan Local Police reportedly shot a civilian man in his home.¹²⁶⁴ On 21 July 2020, one civilian was killed, and another one was injured, in an IED explosion planted in front of a local business in Pul-e-Khumri.¹²⁶⁵

¹²⁴⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 Taliban killed, 15 injured in Baghlan offensive, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁹ Xinhua, Around dozen killed or injured as militants attack security base in N. Afghanistan, 16 December 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Baghlan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁵¹ Ariana News, Eight family members killed, wounded in airstrikes – Baghlan, 4 April 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁵² ANI News, Airstrike in Afghanistan's Baghlan kills 10: Taliban, 26 August 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁵³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 – 12 July 2020, 15 July 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹²⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 – 29 November 2020, 3 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁵⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 of a family injured in Baghlan mortar strike, 21 January 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁶ Garda World, Afghanistan: Gunmen target fuel tankers on Baghlan-Samangan highway, 6 August 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 – 29 November 2020, 3 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁵⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan explosion leaves 3 people dead, 5 injured, 9 January 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁹ Tolonews, Blasts in Kabul, Baghlan Kill Three Police Force Members, 16 January 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 – 24 January 2021, 27 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁶¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Baghlan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 March – 5 April 2020), 5 April 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹²⁶³ Voice of Jihad, 4 civilians martyred, 3 houses flattened, 20 April 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 70

¹²⁶⁵ Xinhua, 30 killed in violence in Afghanistan: officials, 21 July 2020, [url](#)

Between 7 and 13 September 2020, two civilians were killed during conflict in the Dara-i Feroz areas of Khost wa Fereng district.¹²⁶⁶ Between 9 and 12 October 2020, several civilians were killed during conflict in Baghlan.¹²⁶⁷ On 9 January 2021, three people including civilians were killed, and several others were injured, by an IED detonation in Pul-e-Khumri city'.¹²⁶⁸ During the week 8–14 February 2021, UNOCHA reported 'intensified' fighting in in Baghlan-e Jadid, Doshi and Pul-e Khumri districts, as well as incidents of 'targeted killings, abductions and illegal checkpoints'. One civilian was reportedly killed by fighting'.¹²⁶⁹ On 23 February 2021, a civilian was 'killed by gunfire in Baghlan-e-Jadid district'.¹²⁷⁰

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020–28 February 2021, reporting 33 005 persons displaced from Baghlan, of which 31 752 (some 96 %) were displaced within the province, while 1 253 persons were displaced to Kabul, Kapisa, Panjsher, and Samangan provinces. During the same period, no displacement was reported to Baghlan from other provinces.¹²⁷¹

By district, the vast majority of displacement during the reference period occurred within Pul-e Khumri district (94.4 %). Other districts where displacement was recorded included Khost wa Fereng, Dahana-e Ghuri, Doshi, Baghlan-e Jadid, Tala wa Barfak and Andarab.¹²⁷²

Some of the indicative events include: On 24 January 2020, around 2 086 people were displaced in Pul-e Khumri district, while on 10 February 2020, another 2 597 people were displaced within the same district.¹²⁷³ Between 30 March – 5 April 2020, around 700 people were displaced by conflict to the Dasht-e Alwan area in Pul-e Khumri district.¹²⁷⁴ According to IOM, between January and June 2020, some 7 554 people were displaced from Baghlan.¹²⁷⁵

Between 24 and 30 August 2020, some 2 100 people were displaced in Cheshm area of Pul-e Khumri district.¹²⁷⁶ During the week 7 – 13 September 2020, around 1 260 people were displaced 'in the Dara-e-Feroz areas of Khost wa Fereng district'.¹²⁷⁷

On 4 January 2021, around 210 people were displaced 'from Gorgorak village and the Cheshma-e-Shir area to Pul-e Khumri district'.¹²⁷⁸ Between 11 and 17 January 2021, conflict led to displacement of people 'from remote villages to Pul-e Khumri district'.¹²⁷⁹

¹²⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 – 13 September 2020), 16 September 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹²⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (12 – 18 October 2020), 22 October 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁶⁸ India Blooms, Afghanistan: IED explosion leaves three dead, 9 January 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (8 – 14 February 2021), 14 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁷¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁷² UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁷³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 March – 5 April 2020), 5 April 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹²⁷⁵ IOM DTM Afghanistan, Baseline Mobility Assessment - Baghlan Summary Results, Round 10 - Jan – Jun 2020, 6 April 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹²⁷⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (24 – 30 August 2020), 30 August 2020, [url](#), p. 1

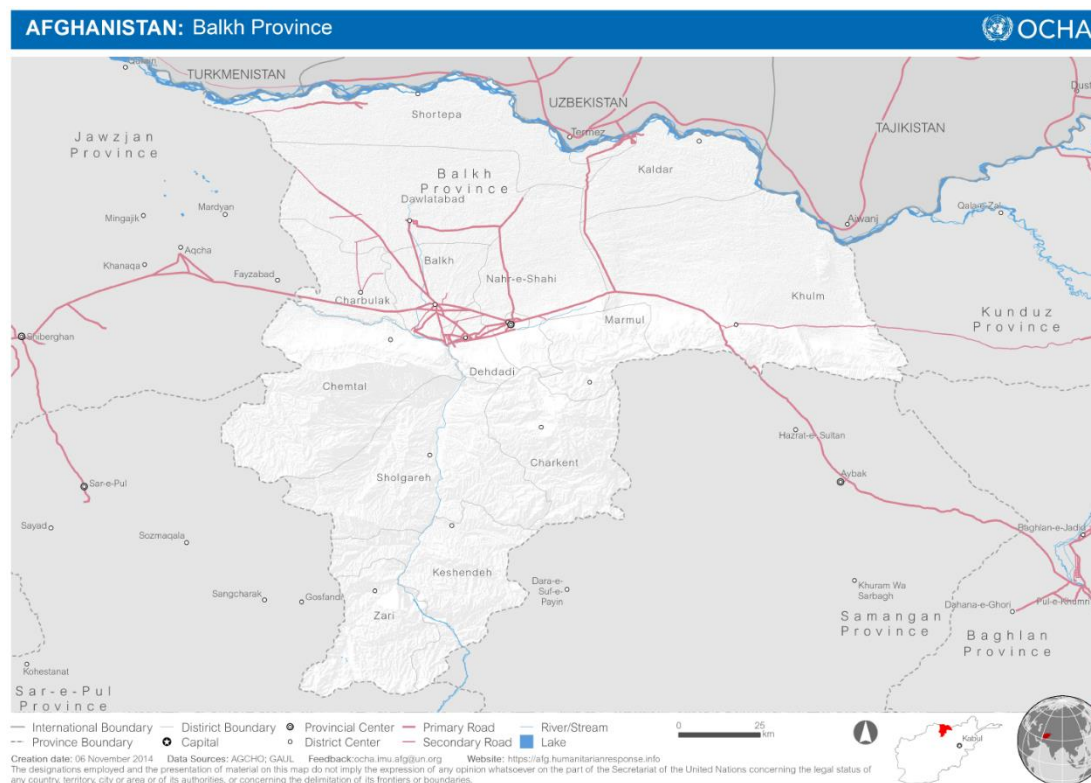
¹²⁷⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 – 13 September 2020), 16 September 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹²⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 – 10 January 2021), 13 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁷⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (11 – 17 January 2021), 19 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

2.5 Balkh

2.5.1 General description of the province



Map 5: Afghanistan – Balkh province, source: UNOCHA¹²⁸⁰

Balkh province is located in the northern part of Afghanistan and is divided into the following districts: Balkh, Charbulak, Charkent, Chemtal, Dawlatabad, Dehdadi, Kaldar, Keshendeh, Khulm, Marmul, Mazar-e Sharif, Nahr-e Shahi, Sholgareh, Shortepa, and Zari. The provincial capital is Mazar-e Sharif.¹²⁸¹

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1 475 649, approximately 469 247 of whom live in the provincial capital, Mazar-e Sharif.¹²⁸²

Balkh is an ethnically diverse province, inhabited by Pashtun, Uzbek, Hazara, Tajik, Turkmen, Aimaq, Baloch, Arab¹²⁸³ and Sunni Hazara (Kawshi) communities.¹²⁸⁴

Balkh – and more specifically Mazar-e Sharif – is an import/export hub as well as a regional trading centre.¹²⁸⁵ The Ring Road connects Mazar-e Sharif with Jawzjan's capital Shiberghan (crossing Nahr-e Shahi, Balkh and Charbulak districts) and further on Herat in the west and with Kabul in the east (crossing Nahr-e Shahi and Khulm districts).¹²⁸⁶ The highway leading to the Uzbek border crossing

¹²⁸⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 4

¹²⁸¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014, [url](#), p. 3

¹²⁸² Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-20, 18 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 3; 27

¹²⁸³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Balkh, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁸⁴ US Naval Postgraduate School, Balkh Provincial Review, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁸⁵ Samuel Hall, Economic Assessment and Labour Market Survey of Mazar-i Sharif, Pul-i Khumri, Kandahar City and Kunduz City, 16 January 2017, [url](#), p. 43; RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Industry Ministry To Revive Industrial Park In North, 13 July 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁶ MSF, Afghanistan Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#), pp. 1; 3; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014, [url](#), p. 2

point Hairatan-Termiz branches off the Ring Road east of Mazar-e Sharif.¹²⁸⁷ Mazar-e Sharif has an airport with scheduled passenger services to national and international destinations.¹²⁸⁸ The international airport, officially called Mawlana Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi International Airport,¹²⁸⁹ adjacent to the German-run¹²⁹⁰ base Camp Marmal,¹²⁹¹ is located about 9 km east from Mazar-e Sharif city centre,¹²⁹² outside of Mazar-e Sharif's municipal boundaries.¹²⁹³ According to UNOCHA maps, the airport is located in Marmul district, implying that one has to travel through a part of Nahr-e Shahi district, which encapsulates Mazar-e Sharif district, to reach Mazar city from the airport.¹²⁹⁴ Another small airport is located in Dehdadi district,¹²⁹⁵ however no information on its activities and services was available.

2.5.2 Conflict background and actors in Balkh

Up until early 2019 Balkh was usually described as one of the relatively calm and most stable provinces of Afghanistan,¹²⁹⁶ largely due to a monopoly on power by the former warlord Atta Mohammed Noor, who was governor of Balkh for more than a decade.¹²⁹⁷ Even after Noor's resignation in 2018 his influence in the province continued to be strong.¹²⁹⁸ Atta Noor's militiamen formed most of the provincial police force.¹²⁹⁹ However, the security situation in Balkh province deteriorated in 2019.¹³⁰⁰ A representative of an international organisation who met with the Swedish Migration Agency in Kabul in January 2020 saw Noor's forced resignation as a contributing factor to the worsening security situation in Balkh.¹³⁰¹ According to local officials interviewed by the New York Times in early 2021, Atta Noor, although no longer governor, still holds much power over the security network in the province.¹³⁰²

According to Afghan news portals Tolonews and Pajhwok Afghan News, the tensions between the President and Noor around Noor's resignation were followed by an increased presence of armed men in Mazar-e Sharif in 2018, who allegedly had links to political parties and members of parliament.¹³⁰³ Subsequently, the increase in presence of armed men in the city was reportedly

¹²⁸⁷ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁸ KamAir, Departing/Arrival Information, n.d., [url](#); Flightradar24, Routes Mazar-I-Sharif, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁸⁹ UNODC, Inauguration of Airport Interdiction Unit (AIU) at Mawlana Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi International Airport, Mazar-i-Sharif, 10 February 2021, [url](#); Afghanistan, ACAA, AIRAC AIP Amendment, 20 December 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹²⁹⁰ France24, Violence flares in north Afghanistan as forces ready for deadly winter, 24 December 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁹¹ DW, Germany extends Afghanistan Mission, 12 October 2007, [url](#)

¹²⁹² LCA, Afghanistan Mazar-i-Sharif (Mawlana Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi) International Airport, September 2017, [url](#); Afghanistan, ACAA, International Airfields, 10 January 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, ACAA, Aerodrome (AD) Part 3, AIP Edition 90, 5 November 2020, [url](#), p. 383

¹²⁹³ UN-HABITAT, State of Afghan cities 2015. Volume 1, 15 December 2015, [url](#), p. 80

¹²⁹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014, [url](#), pp. 2; 12

¹²⁹⁵ MSF, Afghanistan Country Kit, 12 January 2016,

[url](#), p. 3; Afghanistan, ACAA, All airports, 24 September 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁶ Reuters, Gunfight erupts in north Afghan city over police chief's appointment, 14 March 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Taliban Planning To Disrupt Balkh Security: Police Chief, 22 August 2019, [url](#); New York Times (The), Inside the Shadowy Militias Luring Unsuspecting Afghans to Fight, or Die, 4 February 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁷ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#); RFE/RL, Powerful Afghan Governor Resigns, Ending Standoff With Ghani, 22 March 2018, [url](#); Ruttig, T., "Atta for President" Again? The struggle for the Afghan presidency and Jamiat's leadership, AAN, 10 April 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁸ Reuters, Gunfight erupts in north Afghan city over police chief's appointment, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁹ RFE/RL, Rival Police Clash In North Afghan City In Spat Between President, Ex-Governor, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's influence, insecurity grow in Balkh, 18 August 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁰¹ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 46

¹³⁰² New York Times (The), Inside the Shadowy Militias Luring Unsuspecting Afghans to Fight, or Die, 4 February 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁰³ Tolonews, Illegal Armed Men 'A Big Challenge For Balkh Residents', 12 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 injured as gunmen loyal to MPs clash in Balkh, 28 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal armed men threaten Mazar-i-Sharif security, 22 May 2018, [url](#)

linked to a rise in criminal activities such as armed robberies, murder, clashes, and kidnapping in Balkh's capital in early 2018¹³⁰⁴ and remained a source of concern for Balkh's residents in 2019¹³⁰⁵, prompting the police to take action against unregistered vehicles and motorcycles increasingly involved in crimes in October 2019.¹³⁰⁶

Despite a much smaller presence in Balkh in 2019 compared to other northern regions,¹³⁰⁷ the Taliban's influence reportedly increased in 2019 according to local security officials and residents.¹³⁰⁸ In May 2020, a Sar-e Pul provincial council member mentioned the Taliban running checkpoints in various villages of Zari district, on the road towards Mazar-e Sharif.¹³⁰⁹ Also in April 2020, the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reported on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with new appointments made in Balkh province.¹³¹⁰

As of 12 March 2021, an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Dawlatabad district as 'Taliban-controlled', Charbulak, Chemtal and Zari districts as 'contested' and the remaining districts in Balkh province as 'government-controlled'. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Charkent, Dehdadi, Balkh, Shortepa, Nahr-e Shahi, Sholgara districts shifted to 'contested'.¹³¹¹ A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021,¹³¹² designated 51.13 % of Balkh's territory under Taliban control, 44.40 % under government control and 4.47 % controlled by neither side, with the Taliban not fully controlling any of the districts in Balkh. According to the same survey, 523 959 of Balkh's inhabitants lived in areas under Taliban control, 939 455 of the province's population lived in areas under government control and 45 770 of Balkh's residents lived in areas controlled by neither side.¹³¹³ In January 2021, Taliban collected electricity bills from power consumers in parts of Balkh and Nahr-e Shahi districts under their control.¹³¹⁴

Local officials claimed in December 2019 that ISKP had increased its activities in all provinces of the northern region, including Balkh, in the previous months.¹³¹⁵ However, no security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Balkh between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021.¹³¹⁶

¹³⁰⁴ Tolonews, Illegal Armed Men 'A Big Challenge For Balkh Residents', 12 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal gunmen seen behind insecurity in Mazar-i-Sharif, 25 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 injured as gunmen loyal to MPs clash in Balkh, 28 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Mazar-i-Sharif garrison failing to bar illegal gunmen: Residents, 7 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal armed men threaten Mazar-i-Sharif security, 22 May 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Mazar Man Killed For His Motorcycle, 22 July 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Increasing crime incidents worry Balkh dwellers, 26 October 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Undocumented vehicles, bikes being seized in Balkh, 27 October 2019, [url](#); TKG, Unknown Gunmen Kill 3 Employees of Private Company in Balkh Province, 28 June 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁷ Reuters, Gunfight erupts in north Afghan city over police chief's appointment, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's influence, insecurity grow in Balkh, 18 August 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁹ Ruttig, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balhab District: Are the Taleban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

¹³¹⁰ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para 16

¹³¹¹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#) The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated. For more information on the methodology used by, see the Introduction section of this report.

¹³¹² Through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires, Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed a total of 1 266 respondents for this survey, randomly selected across the country. Pajhwok acknowledges the complexity of this task and the possible inaccuracy of the provided information.

¹³¹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

¹³¹⁴ Orbandnews, Taliban collect power bills worth 30m Afs in Balkh annually, 18 January 2021, [url](#)

¹³¹⁵ Tolonews, Large-scale Military Operation To Launch in North: Dostum, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

¹³¹⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Balkh province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Balkh province decreased by 16 %.¹³¹⁷

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Balkh province was under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps,¹³¹⁸ headquartered in Dehdadi district of the province.¹³¹⁹ Primarily present at bases in Kabul and Bagram, the US forces maintained regional hubs as of 30 April 2020, including in Balkh province in the north. Balkh province was included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North was led by German forces and had its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif.¹³²⁰ Following the February 2020 US-Taliban deal, one of the US military bases that closed in the course of 2020 was Shaheen in Balkh province.¹³²¹

In addition to regular government forces, members of pro-government militias or so-called *Arbaki* and local uprising forces¹³²² were present in Balkh province and regular targets in Taliban attacks.¹³²³ In February 2021 the New York Times reported about the phenomenon of the so-called 'one-key militias' in Balkh province, referring to militias for which no registration and thus no proof of member recruitment exists, which allows the commanders to neglect the obligation to pay the recruits, who are often disadvantaged and tempted to join under false pretexts and receive no adequate training or equipment. Since there is no official record of those militias at the provincial or national level, it is difficult to assess the extent of that network. According to the New York Times, the people responsible for recruiting for this militia network in Balkh are allies of Atta Mohammad Noor.¹³²⁴

Both former Balkh governor Atta Noor and former police commander Nizamuddin Qaysari, whose militias were involved in clashes with government forces in Mazar-e Sharif in 2019,¹³²⁵ indicated to be ready and willing to take up a role in solving crimes, such as the kidnapping of a nine-year old boy in November 2020,¹³²⁶ or in fighting AGEs.¹³²⁷

¹³¹⁷ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

¹³¹⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12, p. 50;

USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹³¹⁹ Tolonews, 209 Shaheen Corps: The Base The Taliban Attacked, 22 April 2017, [url](#)

¹³²⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 3; 14; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan. December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹³²¹ CSIS, 1 December 2020, The Biden Transition and the Real Impact of U.S. Force Cuts in Afghanistan [url](#)

¹³²² For more information on *arbaki* and uprising forces, see section 1.2.1. of this report.

¹³²³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Pro-government commander killed by Taliban in Balkh, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

¹³²⁴ New York Times (The), Inside the Shadowy Militias Luring Unsuspecting Afghans to Fight, or Die, 4 February 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

¹³²⁵ RFE/RL, Rival Police Clash In North Afghan City In Spat Between President, Ex-Governor, 14 March 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Gunfight erupts in north Afghan city over police chief's appointment, 14 March 2019, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, updated 30 December 2019, [url](#); Kaama Press: BREAKING: Government storms a warlord's home with Helicopter gunships in northern Balkh province as he refuses to surrender to security forces, 15 December 2019, [url](#)

¹³²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, I can expose Balkh child's kidnappers if govt wants so: Qaisari, 21 January 2021, [url](#)

¹³²⁷ Tolonews, Qaisari in Kabul to Meet With Govt Officials, 1 September 2020, [url](#); Hesam, H. (@hhesam), [Twitter], posted on: 24 December 2020, [url](#)

2.5.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

Throughout 2020 Balkh continued to be one of the provinces where civilians were most affected by the conflict, according to UNAMA.¹³²⁸ In 2020, UNAMA ranked Balkh second in terms of civilians most affected by the conflict, documenting 712 civilian casualties (263 deaths and 449 injured) in the province. This represents an increase of 157 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of civilian casualties were ground engagements, accounting for nearly half of all civilian casualties in Balkh, followed by airstrikes and non-suicide IEDs.¹³²⁹ In 2020, civilian casualties from ground engagements increased in Balkh province, ranking it second in terms of civilian casualties caused by this type of incidents, according to UNAMA.¹³³⁰ Resolute Support (RS) recorded between 102 and 150 civilian casualties in Balkh in the first half of 2020, reporting similar numbers of civilian casualties between the first and second quarter of 2020.¹³³¹ RS data on civilian casualties per province for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.¹³³²

Balkh province was among the four provinces in Afghanistan where the UN recorded most security incidents throughout 2020 and in early 2021.¹³³³ In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, sources consulted by ACLED reported 620 violent events in Balkh province, of which 423 were coded as 'battles', 166 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 31 as 'violence against civilians'. More than one quarter (159) were recorded in Balkh district. Western districts Charbulak and Chemtal followed with 107 and 75 incidents respectively. Those three districts together accounted for more than half of all violent events recorded by ACLED in Balkh province between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021.¹³³⁴ These districts, also joined by Sholgareh, scored over 3.0 in conflict intensity¹³³⁵ on a scale from 1.0 (lowest) to 4.0 (highest) in UNOCHA's hard-to-reach districts list as of December 2020.¹³³⁶

¹³²⁸ UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflicts, Quarterly report: 1 January - 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, [url](#), p. 3; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020 (revised on 10 August 2020, [url](#), p. 5; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 72; 110

¹³²⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 72; 110

¹³³⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72

¹³³¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹³³² SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

¹³³³ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/753–S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), para 21; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/897–S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), para 21; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/634–S/2020/1182, 9 December 2020, [url](#), para 19; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General, A/75/811–S/2021/252, 12 March 2021, [url](#), para 18

¹³³⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Balkh province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹³³⁵ Indicators used for analysing the conflict intensity were: number of kinetic conflict events (25 %), number of casualties (40 %: conflict actors – 25 %, civilian casualties – 75 %), number of airstrikes/IDF incidents (10 %), number of IED/UXO incidents (detonations and discoveries) (10 %) and active/disputed control (15 %)

¹³³⁶ UNOCHA, Hard-To-Reach Districts, 11 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 4-6

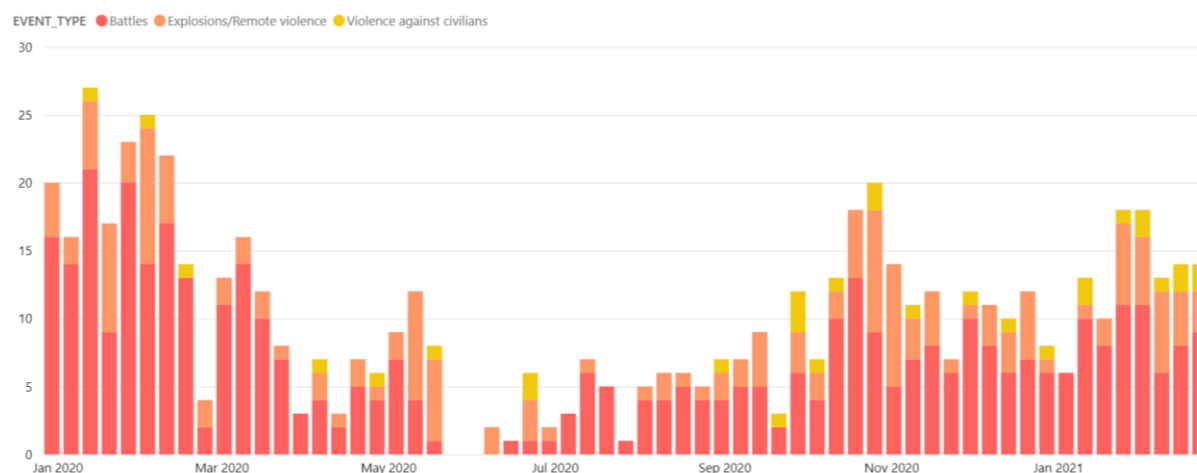


Figure 10: Balkh province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹³³⁷

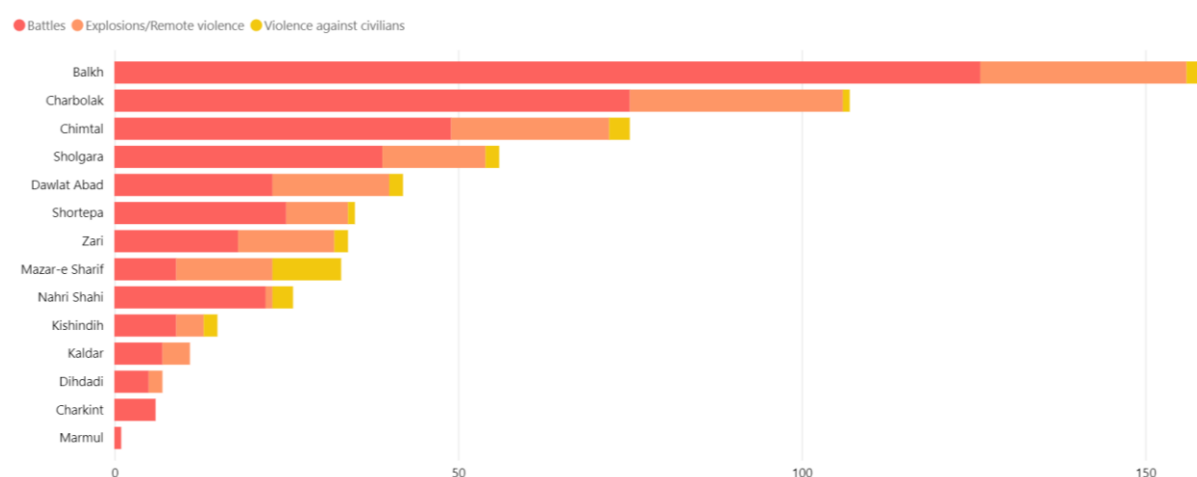


Figure 11: Balkh province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹³³⁸

In some of its 2020 weekly bulletins, UNOCHA reported that, within the northern region, most armed clashes between ANDSF and AGEs occurred in Balkh province.¹³³⁹ The incidents coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, concerned nearly all ‘armed clashes’.¹³⁴⁰ The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police, ANA soldiers or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias¹³⁴¹ or attacks on military or police facilities such as

¹³³⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Balkh province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹³³⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Balkh province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 13 events (9 battles, 2 remote violence and 2 violence against incidents) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

¹³³⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (29 June – 5 July 2020, 8 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 – 19 July 2020, 22 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 – 11 October 2020), 14 October 2020, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (9 – 15 November 2020), 18 November 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁴⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Balkh province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁴¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#)

checkpoints¹³⁴² and bases¹³⁴³ and on convoys¹³⁴⁴ and vehicles,¹³⁴⁵ or clashes between ANDSF and AGEs.¹³⁴⁶ Some of those armed clashes resulted in civilian casualties, for example, two civilians were killed in a Taliban attack on two police officers patrolling in Balkh district centre on 27 July 2020.¹³⁴⁷ Several civilians were killed and injured when the Taliban surrounded a house in Charkent district in September 2020.¹³⁴⁸ In that same district four civilians were killed in February 2021 in an attempt by the Taliban to steal a flock of 400 to 450 sheep that resulted in clashes between the group and locals.¹³⁴⁹

Operations, such as some carried out in February 2020¹³⁵⁰ or an operation named Shaheen-611 in several districts of Balkh province in April 2020¹³⁵¹ and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs¹³⁵² were also recorded under 'armed clashes' by ACLED. Most were carried out in January and February 2020, according to ACLED data.¹³⁵³ Some of these operations were backed by air strikes, for example in Zari district in January 2020¹³⁵⁴ or in Charbulak district in January 2021.¹³⁵⁵

The Taliban carried out attacks on several district centres in Balkh province, including Zari district centre in February 2020,¹³⁵⁶ Dawlatabad district centre in July 2020¹³⁵⁷ or Keshنده district centre on 31 August 2020.¹³⁵⁸ In response to Taliban attacks on checkpoints, Afghan security forces launched an operation called Shaheen 221 in February 2020, during which they managed to clear some vulnerable areas in Chemtal district from the Taliban.¹³⁵⁹ Coordinated attacks by the Taliban on Dawlatabad, Balkh and Chemtal districts were reported in March 2020 and led to operations by security forces.¹³⁶⁰ Failed Taliban offensives on Dawlatabad and Chemtal districts were again reported in November 2020.¹³⁶¹

¹³⁴² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁴³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#);

New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#);

¹³⁴⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 2 Female Soldiers Killed in Gunmen Attack in Balkh, 12 January 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch, 20 May 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's shadow district chief killed in Balkh clash, 20 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 ANA personnel wounded in Balkh clash, 24 January 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁹ Khaama Press, 4 killed as Taliban tried to snatch a flock of sheep in Balkh, 8 February 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁰ Afghan Islamic Press (@aip_news), [Twitter], posted on: 11 February 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, Ministry of Defense (@MoDAfghanistan), [Twitter], posted on: 13 February 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁵¹ Tolonews, '17 Villages Cleared of Taliban' in Balkh: Police, 29 April 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁵² Reporterly (@Reporterlyaf), [Twitter], posted on: 4 February 2021, [url](#); RiV-monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 30 January 2021, [url](#); Reporterly (@Reporterlyaf), [Twitter], posted on: 6 February 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁵³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Balkh province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁴ Afghanistan, Ministry of Defense (@MoDAfghanistan), [Twitter], posted on: 26 January 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Shaheen Corps: 3 Taliban killed, 5 wounded, 31 January 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (17 February – 23 February 2020), 26 February 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁵⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report, July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 5 Security Force Members Killed in Balkh Clashes, 16 July 2020, updated 17 July 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁹ Tolonews, 'Vulnerable' Areas in Chamtal Cleared of Taliban: Army, 8 February 2020, updated 9 February 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh: 2 tanks torched in Dawlatabad firefight, 20 March 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, 25 Taliban militants killed, 33 wounded in Balkh clashes, 24 March 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁶¹ Khaama Press, Balkh: Local Police Commander Killed, 26 November 2020, [url](#)

'Air/drone strikes' made up 10 % of all reported violent incidents in Balkh between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021 by ACLED.¹³⁶² Nearly two out of three air strikes in Balkh province were carried out in following three districts: Charbulak, Chemtal and Balkh. Most air strikes were carried out by Afghan forces, while some were attributed to US forces, particularly in January and May 2020.¹³⁶³ While air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs¹³⁶⁴ and destroyed their facilities or equipment¹³⁶⁵, some also caused civilian casualties such as the air strikes carried out on 25 January 2020 in Boki village of Balkh district during which at least six civilians were killed¹³⁶⁶ or an airstrike on 24 June in Balkh district that killed four members of a family and wounded five others.¹³⁶⁷ In May 2020, the Taliban forced civilians to destroy a main road in Balkh district in order to obstruct government forces. As a result, 13 civilians were killed and 9 were wounded by air strikes.¹³⁶⁸ In the first half of 2020, UNAMA documented more than half of all civilian casualties caused by Afghan Air Force air strikes in Kunduz and Balkh provinces.¹³⁶⁹

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs to target security forces¹³⁷⁰ or government officials¹³⁷¹, represented 12 % of all ACLED-reported violent incidents in Balkh between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021.¹³⁷² Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians, as for example in Sholgareh district in early November 2020, when two back to back blasts targeting a local uprising commander killed three people, including him, and injured several others,¹³⁷³ in Balkh district on 19 December 2020 when four civilians were killed in a roadside bomb explosion,¹³⁷⁴ and in an explosion targeting an NDS member in Kaldar district in January 2021.¹³⁷⁵

Mortars fired by Afghan forces caused civilian casualties in Zari district in January,¹³⁷⁶ February¹³⁷⁷ and September 2020.¹³⁷⁸

¹³⁶² These do not include air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under 'battles'. For more information on ACLED's methodology, please consult the introduction.

¹³⁶³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Balkh province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁴ Reportedly, 57 Taliban Militants Killed in Balkh Airstrikes, 11 February 2021, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 26 insurgents killed in Balkh, Badakhshan, 7 November 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁵ Khaama press, Video: Airstrike destroys key Taliban compound in Balkh province, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁶ RFE/RL, Afghan Officials Say Four Children, Three Women Killed In Air Strikes, 26 January 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Despite Calm in Afghan Cities, War in Villages Kills Dozens Daily, 29 January 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January – 2 February 2020, 5 February 2020, [url](#), p. 2; Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 of a family killed in Balkh airstrike, residents claim, 26 January 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020 (revised on 10 August 2020, [url](#), p. 16

¹³⁶⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020 (revised on 10 August 2020, [url](#), p. 17; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 60

¹³⁶⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020 (revised on 10 August 2020, [url](#), p. 16

¹³⁷⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Balkh Suicide Bombing Claims 1, Injures 8, 19 September 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁷¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁷² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Balkh province, updated 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁷³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Uprising commander injured, son killed in Balkh blasts, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, updated 30 January 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, [url](#), p. 6

¹³⁷⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Third Quarter Report: 1 January To 30 September 2020, October 2020, [url](#), p. 19

Thirty one incidents categorised by ACLED as ‘violence against civilians’ included the killing of off-duty police personnel¹³⁷⁹, the abduction and killing of civilians by the Taliban on 7 April 2020 in Sholgareh district¹³⁸⁰ and the killing of a woman the Taliban suspected of cooperating with the government in Zari district in January 2021.¹³⁸¹ The Taliban reported on several killings of civilians by security forces during operations on its website Voice of Jihad.¹³⁸² The remaining incidents were attributed to unknown armed groups and included the killing of civilians for unclear reasons.¹³⁸³ Incidents of violence against civilians represented 5 % of all violent events in Balkh province coded by ACLED between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021, about one third occurring in Mazar-e Sharif district.¹³⁸⁴ Examples of incidents of violence against civilians in Mazar-e Sharif district will be included further in this chapter. In addition to the incidents recorded by ACLED, UNAMA documented the killing of a schoolteacher by the Taliban on 24 October 2020, due to both his work with the Department of Education and having expressed anti-Taliban sentiments and the shooting and injuring of a humanitarian demining convoy driver on the Mazar-Hairatan highway in Shortepa district in August 2020. Another driver of the convoy was abducted but released unharmed a few days later.¹³⁸⁵ There were also reports on the killing of civilians, including a man getting ready for his wedding, by the Taliban in September 2020¹³⁸⁶ and on the abduction of seven employees of a private construction company by the Taliban in October 2020.¹³⁸⁷

Incidents of the Taliban using residential homes were reported for example from Zari district on 1 May 2020 when the Taliban, fleeing after having attacked the police headquarters and the district governor’s office, tried to hide in civilian houses and killed a civilian who refused to open the door. In October 2020 the Taliban entered a home in Dawlatabad district forcing the owners to give them food. An airstrike targeting the Taliban caused injury to a woman in that house.¹³⁸⁸

The detonation of a truck loaded with explosives, reportedly targeting an ANA compound in Balkh district on 25 August 2020 did not only cause several civilian casualties, but inflicted heavy damage to several civilian homes nearby as well.¹³⁸⁹ The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.¹³⁹⁰

Security incidents along the stretch of the Mazar-Shiberghan highway running through Balkh province continued to be reported in 2020.¹³⁹¹ Without further specifying which provinces or districts were impacted, sources reported that civilian movements along main roads and roads

¹³⁷⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban abduct, slay 8 civilians in Balkh, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸¹ Reporterly, Taliban Kidnapped & Shot Killed Woman in Balkh: Local Officials, 11 January 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁸² Voice of Jihad, War crimes of the internal enemies (May 2020, 5 June 2020, [url](#); Voice of Jihad, War Crimes (October 2020) 11 November 2020, [url](#); Voice of Jihad, War Crimes (November 2020, 10 December 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 civilians, policeman gunned down in Balkh, 17 December 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Balkh province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 38, 54

¹³⁸⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁷ Reporterly, ‘Taliban’ Abduct 7 Employees Of Construction Company In Balkh, 24 October 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 7 Employees of Construction Company Kidnapped in Balkh, 23 October 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 59-60

¹³⁸⁹ Tolonews, Car Bomb Targets Army Unit in Balkh, Four Dead, 25 August 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan New, Balkh truck bombing damages homes, causes casualties, 25 August 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban truck bomb, other attacks kill dozen across Afghanistan, 25 August 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 highway police personnel killed in Balkh assault, 1 January 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, updated 30 January 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (24 February – 1 March 2020, 4 March 2020, [url](#), p. 2; Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh: Taliban kill 7 policemen in captivity, 9 December 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 – 13 December 2020), 16 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

between provincial capital and district centres were interrupted and humanitarian activities were obstructed in the northern region of Afghanistan due to attacks, clashes or illegal checkpoints in Balkh in March 2020,¹³⁹² in September 2020¹³⁹³ as well as in January and February 2021.¹³⁹⁴ Despite reassurances and promises by the Afghan security forces about improving the security on the northern highways, the situation worsened in the last quarter of 2020. Passengers complained about increasing insecurity, the presence of Taliban checkpoints, extortion and threats by the Taliban or other armed men.¹³⁹⁵ The New York Times reported in February 2021 that the highways in the north, which are vital as they offer the limited options of traveling between provinces by road, 'have increasingly become the front line for an emboldened Taliban insurgency'.¹³⁹⁶

The WHO registered the closure of one health facility, the damaging of another one, the killing of a person and the wounding of another person in attacks on health care in Balkh province in 2020.¹³⁹⁷ UNAMA recorded the looting of medical supplies by ANA in Zari district on 26 April 2020. The medical supplies belonged to an NGO, accused by the ANA of supporting the Taliban with those supplies.¹³⁹⁸

In June 2020, through its Twitter account, the Kabul-based news service reportedly cited residents of Balkh district saying that the Taliban blocked access to water and communication networks in the district.¹³⁹⁹

Mazar-e Sharif district/city

Of the 33 violent incidents recorded by ACLED between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021 in Mazar-e Sharif district and representing 5 % of all violent incidents in Balkh province, landmine or IED explosions were the prevalent incident type (42 %). In nearly all other districts of the province this type of incident accounted for less than 20 %. No air strikes were reported in Mazar-e Sharif.¹⁴⁰⁰ On 14 January 2020, an explosion in PD9 of Mazar-e Sharif City, reportedly in front of the residence of the Balkh district governor, killed two children. This was followed by another explosion wounding at least seven civilians.¹⁴⁰¹ Civilians were killed or injured in explosions in PD3 of Mazar-e Sharif city on 1 July 2020,¹⁴⁰² in PD1 on 19 September 2020¹⁴⁰³ and in PD2 on 19 December 2020.¹⁴⁰⁴

¹³⁹² International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch, 19 April 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 – 20 September 2020), 23 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 – 10 January 2021), 13 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (11 – 17 January 2021), 19 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 – 24 January 2021), 27 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁹⁵ Afghanistan Times, Passengers, drivers affected by security situation in north, 21 October 2020, [url](#); Payk Fact-Check, Security Situation In The Northern Highways Of The Country Have Gotten Worse, Instead Of Getting Better, 9 December 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁶ New York Times (The), Inside the Shadowy Militias Luring Unsuspecting Afghans to Fight, or Die, 4 February 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁷ WHO, Afghanistan. – Attacks on Health Care (January 01 - December 31, 2020, 11 January 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁸ UNAMA, Special Report: Attacks On Healthcare During The Covid-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, [url](#), p.12

¹³⁹⁹ Reporterly (@reporterlyaf), [Twitter], posted on: 11 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Balkh province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰¹ AP, Afghan official: Bombs kill 2 children in northern province, 14 January 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 children killed, 8 civilians wounded in Balkh blasts, 14 January 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, updated 30 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰² Tolonews, Two Explosions in Mazar-e-Sharif, One Civilian Killed, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Woman Killed in Balkh Blast, Five More Wounded, 19 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁴ Reporterly (@reporterlyaf), [Twitter], posted on: 19 December 2020, [url](#)

While armed clashes as described above accounted for more than half of all recorded incidents in all other districts in Balkh, in Mazar-e Sharif such incidents represented 27 % of all incidents in the district.¹⁴⁰⁵

About one out of three violent events registered by ACLED in Mazar-e Sharif in the reporting period, were incidents of violence against civilians, whereas in other districts of Balkh province this type of incident represented between 3 and 10 %.¹⁴⁰⁶ The ten incidents coded by ACLED as violence against civilians in Mazar-e Sharif included the killing by of three employees of a construction company in June 2020,¹⁴⁰⁷ the abduction of the head of the moneychangers union in September 2020, who was released a few weeks later,¹⁴⁰⁸ the killing of the driver of the governor of Balkh province on 5 October 2020,¹⁴⁰⁹ of a former jihadi commander¹⁴¹⁰ and of a tribal elder in January 2021,¹⁴¹¹ the abduction and killing of the son of the head of AIHRC for Balkh province also in January 2021,¹⁴¹² an attack on the director of local TV channel Mitra¹⁴¹³ and the killing of a young man in PD8 in February 2021,¹⁴¹⁴ although the police claimed that it was connected to a family dispute.¹⁴¹⁵

Sources consulted by Landinfo during its fact-finding mission to Afghanistan at the end of October 2019, were of the opinion that the security situation in Mazar-e Sharif had worsened in 2019, compared to 2018, attributing this mainly to crime and to a small extent to conflict-related violence.¹⁴¹⁶ The UN Secretary-General noted that inhabitants of larger cities, including Mazar-e Sharif, were increasingly concerned about criminality.¹⁴¹⁷ Residents of Mazar-e Sharif and civil society activists, complained throughout 2020 about a worsening security situation and increasing crime in the city, mentioning the presence of illegal armed men, robberies, abductions, murders and chaos.¹⁴¹⁸ The kidnapping for a large ransom of a nine-year old boy in November 2020 sparked protests that continued in 2021.¹⁴¹⁹ While arrests in the case had been made,¹⁴²⁰ the boy was not released yet in early 2021, prompting the president to threaten to dismiss all security officials in Balkh province in January 2021.¹⁴²¹ Despite reports of arrests of large numbers of people in

¹⁴⁰⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Balkh province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Balkh province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Balkh province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁸ Reporterly (@reporterlyaf), [Twitter], posted on: 11 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh governor's driver shot dead; vehicle snatched, 5 October 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Unknown Gunmen Kills Governor Driver in Balkh, 5 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Former jihadi commander killed in Balkh, 4 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹¹ RiV-Monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 27 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh Human Rights Commissioner's son killed, 14 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹³ RSF (@RSF_inter), [Twitter], posted on: 2 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁴ Reporterly (@reporterlyaf), [Twitter], posted on: 10 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁵ Ariana News (@Ariana News_), [Twitter], posted on: 10 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁶ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan. Sikkerhetssituasjonen i Balkhprovinns i 2019, 6 April 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁴¹⁷ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General A/74/993–S/2020/809, 18 August 2020, [url](#), para 20

¹⁴¹⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh police record over 800 crimes in six months, 17 February 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkhis express mixed reaction to Security Charter, 5 December 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh governor's driver shot dead; vehicle snatched, 5 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁹ TKG, Thousands Protest in Balkh over Kidnapped Child, 7 February 2021, [url](#); Vice, Child Kidnapping Is Posing a New Challenge to Afghanistan's Beleaguered Police Force, 30 December 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Angry Protestors in Balkh Call for Rescue of Abducted Child, 5 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁰ AVA, Kidnappers Post New Video of Child, Increase Ransom, 30 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴²¹ Payk Fact-Check, Abdul Raouf, The Abducted Child, Has Not Been Freed Yet And Is Still In Captivity Of The Kidnappers, 2 January 2021, [url](#); AVA, Ghani threatens to fire Balkh security chiefs over boy's kidnapping, 18 January 2021, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Kidnapped child's family demands his release, warns to block roads, 7 February 2021, [url](#)

connection with criminal offenses,¹⁴²² the dismissal of security officials in September 2020 in an attempt to stand stronger against the security threat and crimes,¹⁴²³ or the implementation of a Security Charter program since late November 2020,¹⁴²⁴ the complaints and concerns about rising crime continued in early 2021.¹⁴²⁵ A civil society activist linked the growing number of illegal armed men in Mazar-e Sharif to the worsened security situation in several of Balkh's districts in 2020, explaining that the Taliban's territorial gains had led to the arrival of more public uprising members and local police in Mazar-e Sharif, resulting in more armed men moving around the city.¹⁴²⁶

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 16 812 persons displaced from Balkh, of which 16 772 (over 99 %) were displaced within the province. During the same period, 23 191 persons were displaced to Balkh.¹⁴²⁷

The largest groups of IDPs from Balkh were registered in January, February, May and October 2020. Most were displaced from Charbulak, especially in May 2020 and January 2021 and from Dawlatabad, mostly in February and October 2020. Large groups were displaced from Sholgarah, in particular in May and October 2020, from Chemtal, especially in February and August 2020, from Keshنده, in particular in May 2020 and from Zari, mainly in March 2020.¹⁴²⁸ Several hundreds of IDPs were registered from Shortepa district in January 2020, due to military operations in that district¹⁴²⁹ and from Charkent district in October 2020.¹⁴³⁰

Seven individuals from Balkh district were registered by UNOCHA as displaced due to conflict in June 2020. UNOCHA registered another seven IDPs from Mazar-e Sharif district in August 2020.¹⁴³¹

In addition to the people displaced within the province, Balkh also hosted IDPs from Faryab province and to a lesser extent from Jawzjan province. Together Mazar-e Sharif and Nahr-e Shahi districts hosted 90 % of all people IDPs looking for refuge in Balkh province. Other districts hosting IDPs, albeit to a far lesser extent, were Dehdadi, Sholgarah and Charkent.¹⁴³²

¹⁴²² Tolonews, Balkh Residents Want Action Against Increased Armed Robberies, 12 January 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 45 suspects captured in connection with criminal offenses in Balkh, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴²³ Khaama press, Mol Fires 14 Security Officials in Balkh, 13 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkhis express mixed reaction to Security Charter, 5 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Crimes at peak in Mazar-i-Sharif, complain residents, 20 January 2021, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Growing presence of illegal gunmen worries Mazar residents, 26 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Growing presence of illegal gunmen worries Mazar residents, 26 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (24 February – 1 March 2020, 4 March 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴²⁹ UNOCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January – 2 February 2020, 5 February 2020, [url](#), p. 2

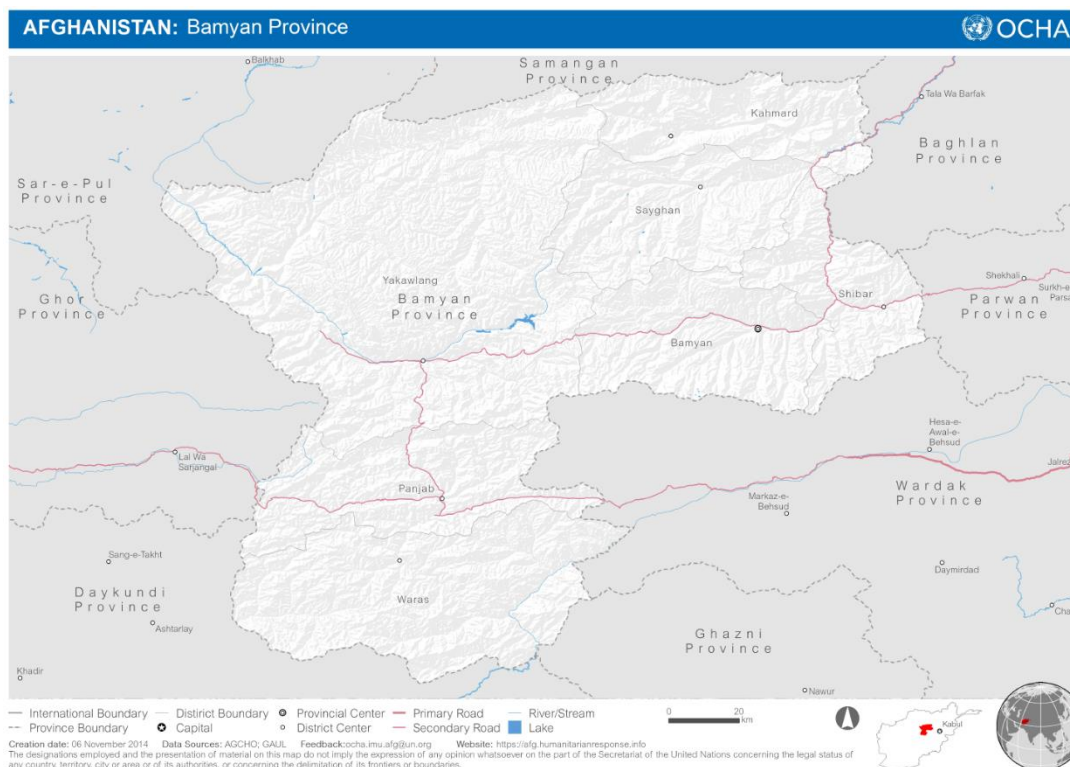
¹⁴³⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴³¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴³² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

2.6 Bamyan

2.6.1 General description of the province



Map 6: Afghanistan – Bamyan province, source: UNOCHA¹⁴³³

Bamyan province is located in the central highlands region¹⁴³⁴ and is divided into the following districts: Bamyan, Kahmard, Panjab, Sayghan, Shibar, Waras and Yakawlang. The provincial capital is Bamyan.¹⁴³⁵ Yakawlang Two is mentioned by the Independent Election Commission as a separate ‘temporary’ district.¹⁴³⁶ According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig, “temporary” districts [...] have been approved after entry into force of the 2004 constitution by the president due to security or other considerations, but have not yet been approved by parliament.¹⁴³⁷

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 486 928.¹⁴³⁸

The main ethnic group in the province is Hazara. Other groups present include a minority of Pashtun, Tajik, and Sayed/Sadat.¹⁴³⁹ According to various sources quoted in a query response by ACCORD, Bamyan’s Sayeds are mostly Hazaras, though they distinguish themselves from other Hazaras, and

¹⁴³³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Bamyan Province, District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Bamyan Province, District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁵ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁴³⁶ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Bamyan, 2020, [url](#);

Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁴³⁷ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good News and Bad News About District Numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁸ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-20, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴³⁹ US Naval Postgraduate School, Bamyan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

are traditionally part of the Hazara religious and political elite.¹⁴⁴⁰ Approximately 90 % of Bamyan's residents are Shias.¹⁴⁴¹

According to the Afghan Civil Aviation report published in November 2020, there is one domestic aerodrome at 1.4 kilometer south of the Bamyan Town centre and within the town limits¹⁴⁴². The aerodrome is connected to Kabul by a daily Kam Air commercial flight.¹⁴⁴³

By road, Bamyan can be reached from Kabul either by the Kabul-Bamyan Highway, via Wardak province, or by the Ghorband Valley, via Parwan province.¹⁴⁴⁴ Bamyan province was planned to be connected to neighbouring Baghlan province via the Baghlan to Bamyan (B2B) Road in 2022.¹⁴⁴⁵ Nevertheless, in September 2020, residents of both provinces criticized the government and the construction company for the irregular construction work and the delay of this project started in 2015.¹⁴⁴⁶ According to the April 2020 report of the Afghan Ministry of Transport (MOT), a road construction was planned between Yakawlang district of Bamyan province and Dara-i Suf district of Samangan province.¹⁴⁴⁷

2.6.2 Conflict background and actors in Bamyan

Certain regions in Afghanistan, like Panjsher province and the area of the central highlands (including Bamyan province¹⁴⁴⁸), have been described as relatively safe and less affected by conflict-driven violence.¹⁴⁴⁹ According to an Afghan military expert cited by Tolonews, the relative stability of Bamyan as well as Daykundi and Panjsher provinces is related to the social cohesion among its inhabitants, as most of them belong to the same ethnic or tribal group.¹⁴⁵⁰ Bamyan's relative stability has also been attributed to the active involvement of religious leaders in local and governmental peace processes in the province.¹⁴⁵¹ In November 2020, despite a non-claimed twin blast which killed 14 people and wounded 50 others,¹⁴⁵² the French newspaper Le Monde mentioned Bamyan Province as a "haven of peace" which attracts visitors from all over the country in the summer.¹⁴⁵³ According to the AFP, quoted by French magazines, many Hazaras, originating from Bamyan, fled Kabul after repeated IS attacks against their community and returned to their province.¹⁴⁵⁴

¹⁴⁴⁰ ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan: Informationen zur Volksgruppe der Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed) [Query response on Afghanistan: Information on the ethnic group of the Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed)], 25 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Bamyan Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴⁴² Afghanistan, ACAA, Aeronautical Information Publication – Aerodrome (AD), Part 3, 5 November 2020, [url](#), p. 54

¹⁴⁴³ Kam Air, Kam Air News, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Hajigak Pass Reopens for Traffic, 26 April 2015, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁵ World Bank (The), Trans-Hindukush Road Connectivity Project, 24 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁶ Tolonews, Govt Criticized for Delay in Doshi-Bamiyan Road Project, 15 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁷ Afghanistan, Ministry of Transport (MOT), Grant -0355- AFG: Transport Network Development Investment Program – Tranche 3 (Dir-i-suf to Yakawlang Road Project), April 2020, [url](#), p.1

¹⁴⁴⁸ Khaama Press, Traditional Dambora Musical Festival Organized in Bamyan Province, 30 June 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Low Turnout, Technical Glitches Mark Afghan Presidential Election, 28 September 2019, [url](#); Reporterly, Challenges of the 2019 Elections: Bamyan, a Province with Heavy Preparedness and Soaring Uncertainty, 31 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁹ DW, Afghanistan: 'A Latent Instability Dominates the Picture', 14 March 2017, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Wants What It Hasn't Been Able to Hold: Hazara Regions, 13 November 2018, [url](#); National (The), Fears of Violence and Fraud Hang over Afghan Presidential Election, 26 September 2019, [url](#); An international organisation Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 12-13; Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 12, 51

¹⁴⁵⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2017 Casualties: Nearly 25,000 People Killed, Wounded in Afghanistan, 14 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵¹ UNAMA, Bamyan Religious Scholars Gather to Discuss Peace-Building in Afghanistan, 20 November 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵² DW, Afghanistan: Deadly blasts hit Bamiyan province, 24 November 2020, [url](#); Le Figaro, Afghanistan: au moins 14 morts dans l'explosion de deux bombes à Bamiyan, 24 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵³ Le Monde, En Afghanistan, l'ombre des talibans plane à nouveau sur les trésors de Bamiyan, 22 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁴ Le Point, Afghanistan: les Hazaras craignent le pire avec le départ des Américains, 28 January 2021, [url](#); L'Express, Afghanistan: les Hazaras craignent le pire avec le départ des Américains, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

According to two international sources interviewed by Landinfo in October 2019, 10 to 15 kilometres on the Kabul-Bamyan Highway had been controlled by the Taliban for several years.¹⁴⁵⁵ In December 2019, Qaane reported on 20 kilometres of this highway, connecting the Hazarajat region to the Afghan capital, under Taliban control.¹⁴⁵⁶ Roadblocks/checkpoints and IED emplacement by armed opposition groups have been reported¹⁴⁵⁷, as well as people being killed¹⁴⁵⁸, kidnapped¹⁴⁵⁹ (passengers working for the Afghan government, NGOs or international troops) and/or extorted¹⁴⁶⁰ by Taliban militants. The victims were mainly Hazaras travelling on this route between Kabul and the Hazarajat region.¹⁴⁶¹ 58 % of respondents of the Asia Foundation's 2019 Survey of the Afghan People in Bamyan province reported to experience fear while travelling.¹⁴⁶² In December 2019, AAN reported on an increasing number of Afghan people taking flights or longer routes to bypass roads situated in contested or Taliban-controlled areas. An NGO employee, cited by AAN, declared to use the Ghorband Valley route (through Parwan province) instead of the road between Maydan Shar and Bamyan.¹⁴⁶³ Truck drivers transporting agricultural produce and other material between Kabul and the Hazarajat region reportedly use the alternative route through Parwan as well, avoiding tax collection by the Taliban along the Kabul-Bamyan Highway.¹⁴⁶⁴ In November 2020, a twin blast killed 14 people and wounded 50 others in Bamyan town. Later, two young men would have confessed that they organized the attack under the orders of the Taliban.¹⁴⁶⁵

No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP have been recorded in Bamyan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED.¹⁴⁶⁶

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted in April and May 2021, indicated all districts of Bamyan province as 'government-controlled' or 'undetermined'.¹⁴⁶⁷ The provincial capital, Bamyan City, is reported to be under government control.¹⁴⁶⁸

A survey of Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021 designated 99.88 % of Bamyan province under the government control and 0.13 % under the Taliban control. According to the same survey, 494 938 of Bamyan inhabitants lived in areas under the government control and 619 in areas under the Taliban control¹⁴⁶⁹.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁴⁵⁶ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁷ ERM, AC401-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Bamyan City of Bamyan Province, August 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 31-June 6, 6 June 2019, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, People Ask for Security of Kabul-Bamyan Highway, 13 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁹ Afghanistan Times, People Ask for Security of Kabul-Bamyan Highway, 13 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁰ Tolonews, NDS Chief Says Claims against Alipoor Will Be Investigated, 27 November 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, People Ask for Security of Kabul-Bamyan Highway, 13 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶¹ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶² Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 63

¹⁴⁶³ Kazemi, S., R., Peace in the Districts (1): A Chasm between High Talks and Local Concerns in Afghanistan, AAN, 11 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁴ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁵ Kabul Now, ANA will create battalion in Bamyan as violence intensifies, 03 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Bamyan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁷ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

¹⁴⁶⁸ ERM, AC401-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Bamyan City, August 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁴⁶⁹ Pajhwok, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

According to AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, insecurity in the insurgency-affected Jalrez district of Wardak province has wider ramifications for the security situation in the Hazarajat region (including Bamyan province), 'given the importance of passing through Jalrez and the risks that this transit entails'.¹⁴⁷⁰ The Kabul-Bamyan Highway, often referred to as the Death Road/Valley¹⁴⁷¹, has been reported as unsafe.¹⁴⁷²

In the beginning of 2021, sources mentioned the presence of the Hazara militia 'Resistance for Justice Movement' in the central highlands of Bamyan. The militia claims to patrol the roads to protect the local population, but also to kidnap, during raids, the Taliban who will serve as a bargaining chip against Hazara hostages.¹⁴⁷³

According to the UNODC Opium Survey from 2020, Bamyan remained opium-free in 2020.¹⁴⁷⁴

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Bamyan is under the responsibility of the 203th ANA Corps. Bamyan province is included in the Task Force Southeast (TF-Southeast), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TF-Southeast is led by US forces and has its headquarters in Paktya province.¹⁴⁷⁵ In November 2018, President Ashraf Ghani ordered the formation of a new 443-strong security unit in Bamyan province, to ensure the protection of (road) construction projects and to conduct special operations.¹⁴⁷⁶ Security forces frequently searched cars and question people in checkpoints.¹⁴⁷⁷ In February 2021, ANA decided to create a battalion structure in the central Bamyan with the agreement of the Province Governor.¹⁴⁷⁸

2.6.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 96 civilian casualties (22 killed and 74 injured) in Bamyan in non-suicide IEDs (leading cause), landmines and targeted killings. This represents an increase of 1 820% compared to 2019.¹⁴⁷⁹ According to SIGAR, Resolute Support (RS) recorded less than 25 civilian casualties in Bamyan province during the first,¹⁴⁸⁰ and the second quarter of 2020.¹⁴⁸¹ No RS information on civilian casualties per province was available for the second half of 2020 in SIGAR quarterly reports.¹⁴⁸²

¹⁴⁷⁰ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷¹ Afghanistan Times, People Ask for Security of Kabul-Bamyan Highway, 13 September 2019, [url](#); Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷² Tolonews, Bamiyan Tourism Takes a Knock due to Security Threats on Roads, 28 June 2017, [url](#); National (The), Coronavirus Shatters Tourism Hopes in Afghanistan's Bamyan Province, 26 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷³ Al Jazeera, Hazaras fear for future as Afghanistan risks slipping into chaos, 3 February 2021, [url](#); Le Point, Afghanistan: les Hazaras craignent le pire avec le départ des Américains, 28 January 2021, [url](#); L'Express, Afghanistan: les Hazaras craignent le pire avec le départ des Américains, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁴⁷⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁴⁷⁶ Tolonews, Ghani Orders Formation of New 443-Strong Security Unit in Bamyan Province, 10 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁷ Al Jazeera, Hazaras fear for future as Afghanistan risks slipping into chaos, 3 February 2021, [url](#); Le Point, Afghanistan: les Hazaras craignent le pire avec le départ des Américains, 28 January 2021, [url](#); L'Express, Afghanistan: les Hazaras craignent le pire avec le départ des Américains, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁸ Kabul Now, ANA will create battalion in Bamyan as violence intensifies, 03 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

¹⁴⁸⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

¹⁴⁸¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹⁴⁸² SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

From 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data on nine violent events in Bamyan province from open sources: six coded as ‘battles’ (67 %) and three as ‘explosions/remote violence’ (33 %).¹⁴⁸³

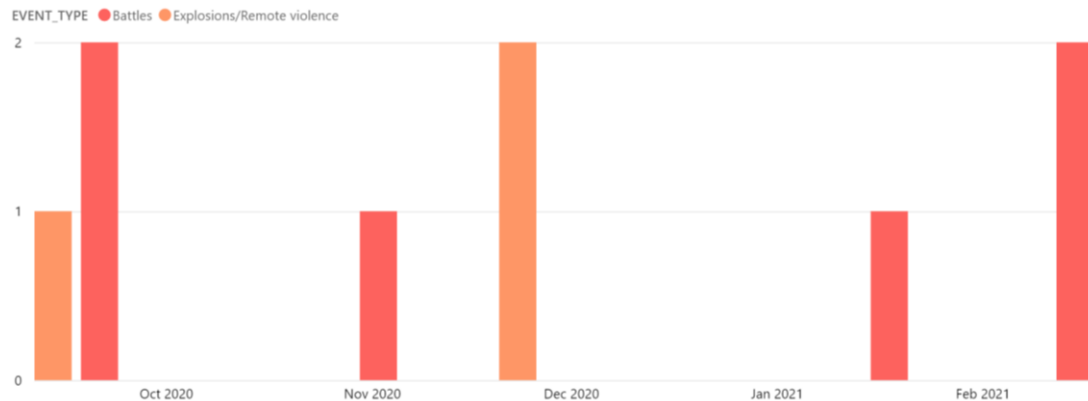


Figure 12: Bamyan province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁴⁸⁴

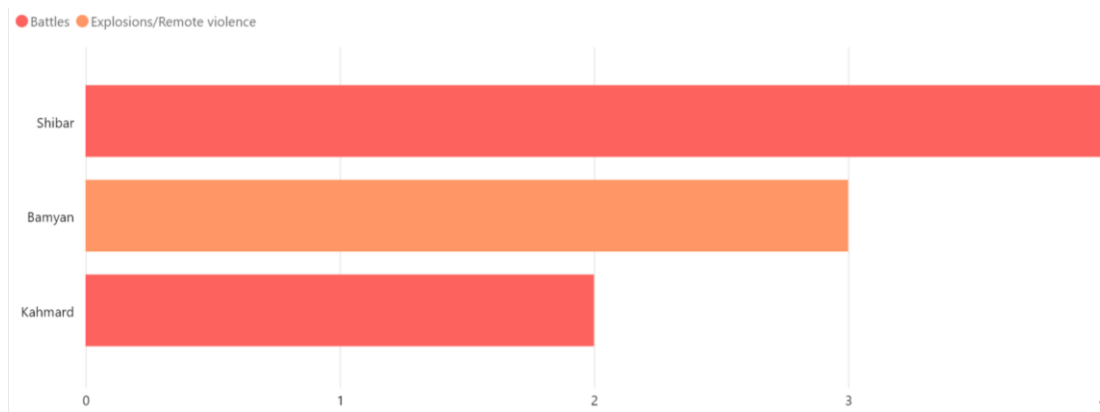


Figure 13: Bamyan province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁴⁸⁵

The category ‘battles’ concerned mainly armed clashes between ANDSF and the Taliban, while the category “explosions/remote violence” concerned grenade, remote explosive, landmine and IED attacks.¹⁴⁸⁶

Moreover, in November 2020, two roadside bombs exploded in a main bazar in Bamyan City killing 14 people and injuring 45 others. The Taliban denied involvement in the bombings and ISKP did not

¹⁴⁸³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Bamyan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Bamyan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Bamyan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Bamyan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

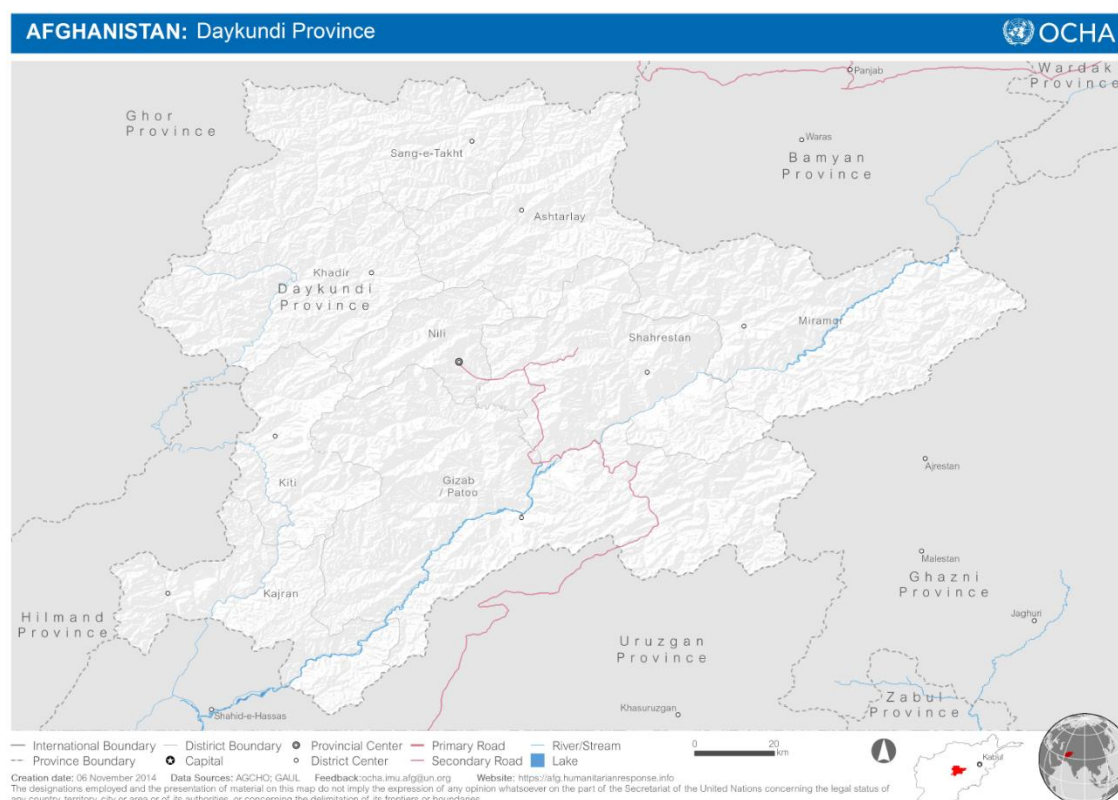
claim responsibility.¹⁴⁸⁷ Later, two young men would have confessed that they organized the attack under the orders of the Taliban.¹⁴⁸⁸

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 483 persons displaced from Bamyan, of which 308 were displaced within the province from Kahmard district to Bamyan district. During the same period, 126 persons from Shibar district and 49 persons from Sayghan district were displaced to Kabul.¹⁴⁸⁹

2.7 Daykundi

2.7.1 General description of the province



Map 7: Afghanistan – Daykundi province, source: UNOCHA¹⁴⁹⁰

Daykundi (Daikundi) province is located in the central region.¹⁴⁹¹ The administrative districts of the province are: Ashtarlay (Ishterlai), Kajran (Kejran), Khadir (Khedir), Kiti, Miramor, Nili, Sang-e Takht, Shahrestan (Shahrستان); the district of Pato is officially defined as 'temporary' district.¹⁴⁹² Pato district, formerly a part of the district of Gizab in Uruzgan province, was reportedly formed in June

¹⁴⁸⁷ DW, Afghanistan: Deadly blasts hit Bamiyan province, 24 November 2020, [url](#); Le Figaro, Afghanistan : au moins 14 morts dans l'explosion de deux bombes à Bamiyan, 24 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁸ Kabul Now, ANA will create battalion in Bamyan as violence intensifies, 03 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 4 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Provincial reference Map, Daykundi Province 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴⁹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Provincial reference Map, Daykundi Province 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴⁹² Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 34

2018.¹⁴⁹³ While UNAMA, AAN, and several media sources mentioned Nawmesh (Nawamish) district as a part of Daykundi province in 2019 and 2020,¹⁴⁹⁴ in June 2020 NSIA listed it as a 'temporary' district of Helmand Province. The provincial capital of Daykundi is Nili.¹⁴⁹⁵

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA), the province had a population of 507 610.¹⁴⁹⁶

Daykundi is a part of the Hazarajat region¹⁴⁹⁷ and the main ethnic group in the province is Hazara. Other groups include a minority of Pashtun, Baloch, and Sayed/Sadat.¹⁴⁹⁸ The district of Pato has both Pashtun and Hazara population.¹⁴⁹⁹

Daykundi has a 'difficult geography':¹⁵⁰⁰ most of its territory is mountainous, and the roads often remain blocked due to heavy winter snowfalls.¹⁵⁰¹ The province was reported to have 'bad' road conditions and lack infrastructure.¹⁵⁰² According to the residents, there was 'only one asphalted road in the province' in 2018.¹⁵⁰³

According to Daykundi's former governor, as of 2018, the province had an airport, which was 'not standard' as it allowed landing of only small planes.¹⁵⁰⁴ In 2020, the National Procurement Authority of Afghanistan issued a tender to construct the airport and relevant infrastructure in Daykundi.¹⁵⁰⁵

2.7.2 Conflict background and actors in Daykundi

The central highlands, including Daykundi province, used to be described as relatively safe areas, which were less affected by conflict-driven violence.¹⁵⁰⁶ In March 2015 and June 2018, Pajhwok Afghan News reported that the residents of Daykundi expressed their fears of Taliban attacks because of the proximity of Helmand and Uruzgan provinces.¹⁵⁰⁷

¹⁴⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi: 80pc of Pato Residents without Tazkira, 6 May 2018, [url](#); Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The Outstanding Role of Women, AAN, 27 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Not Allowing Us to Buy Food: Daikundi Residents, 30 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 49; Afghanistan Times (The), Four Afghan Security Forces, 12 Taliban Insurgents Killed in Daikundi Clash, 12 July 2020, [url](#); Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi Blast: 7 People Killed, 4 Injured, 10 May 2019, [url](#); Reporterly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁵ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 34

¹⁴⁹⁶ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁴⁹⁷ Bhatia, M., Hazarajat: Daykundi, Shahristan, Panjab and Syahkhak, 2008, p. 279; Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁸ US NavalPostgraduate School, Dai Kundi Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁹ Van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Gizab; the Fight Everyone Chose to Ignore, AAN, 31 October 2011, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁰ Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Daykundi Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#); DW, Avalanches Kill 21 People in Afghanistan, Death Toll Expected to Rise, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰² Afghanistan FSC, Daykundi Province Fact Findings (Qualitative Assessment) Report, 18 April 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁵⁰³ Tolonews, Daikundi Secure but Lacks Development: Residents, 6 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁴ Tolonews, Daikundi Secure but Lacks Development: Residents, 6 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁵ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, National Procurement Authority (NPA), Addendum No. 6 to Bidding Documents for Construction of Daikundi Airport, 27 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁶ Tolonews, Daikundi Secure but Lacks Development: Residents, 6 April 2018, [url](#); Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The Outstanding Role of Women, AAN, 27 January 2019, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Spring Offensive and Flooding Since the Afghan New Year, 7 April 2019, [url](#); Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 13; Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 51

¹⁵⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kajran district may fall to Taliban, residents warn, 25 March 2015, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi residents concerned about Daesh in neighbourhood, 3 June 2018, [url](#)

An increase in Taliban attacks causing a deterioration of the security situation in some of Daykundi's districts was reported in July 2019, with the districts of Kajran, Pato, and Nawmesh¹⁵⁰⁸ named as the most insecure areas of the province.¹⁵⁰⁹ According to UNAMA, civilian casualties in Daykundi in 2019 revealed an increase of 71 % compared to 2018.¹⁵¹⁰ As stated by AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, the creation of Pato district affected the security situation in the region, as it sowed local discord.¹⁵¹¹ In April 2019, Daykundi residents, as quoted by Pajhwok Afghan News, related the instability in the province to a competition among political parties.¹⁵¹² In June 2019, Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM) reported that the security situation in Pato¹⁵¹³, Ashtarlay, and Khadir districts was 'highly volatile' due to the fighting between GoA forces and the Taliban in Pato and 'personal dispute between local commanders in Ashtarlay and Khadir'.¹⁵¹⁴

In 2020, MoI and media sources reported on the presence of Taliban militants in Kajran and Pato districts.¹⁵¹⁵ In April 2020, AP described the security situation in Pato as 'volatile'.¹⁵¹⁶ In June 2020, Afghan journalist Bilal Sarwary described Kajran district as a 'corridor' for the Taliban and a part of 'a major smuggling route' from the south to the north of Afghanistan.¹⁵¹⁷ In July 2020, according to a member of the Daykundi provincial council, the Taliban 'surged up their activities' in Kajran and Pato districts as well as in Nawmesh.¹⁵¹⁸ In July 2020, the Khaama Press mentioned 'unprecedented battles' between the ANDSF and the Taliban taking place in Kajran;¹⁵¹⁹ according to a member of the Daykundi provincial council, the Taliban 'surged up their activities' in Kajran and Pato districts as well as in Nawmesh.¹⁵²⁰

In February 2021, the NDS reportedly arrested five key members of the Taliban in Tamzan area of Pato district: allegedly, the arrested persons killed a police officer, were involved in assassinations and planting IEDs on public roads, and 'conducted several terrorist and destructive activities' in Pato and Kajran.¹⁵²¹

As of 5 May 2021, LWJ assessed the district of Kajran as 'contested,' changing its previous status (as of 28 February 2021) which was defined as 'unconfirmable Taliban claim of control.' According to the map, Pato—indicated as Gizab district under Daykundi administration—was also assessed as 'contested.' The remaining districts of Daykundi province were assessed as 'government-controlled or undetermined.' More recently, as of 26 May 2021, all districts of Daykundi were assessed as 'GoA control or undetermined', apart from Kajran district, which remained as 'contested'.¹⁵²² A survey conducted by Pajhwok Afghan News from November 2020 until February 2021, designated 95.6 % of Daykundi's territory as controlled by the Afghan government, 2.2 % by the Taliban, and 2.2 % by no side. According to the same survey, 493 548 of Daykundi's inhabitants lived in the areas controlled

¹⁵⁰⁸ According to NSIA, Nawmesh is a 'temporary' district of Helmand Province, see Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 40

¹⁵⁰⁹ Reportedly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹⁵¹¹ Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The Outstanding Role of Women, AAN, 27 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Political Parties Seen As a Source of Insecurity in Daikundi, 14 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹³ The source refers to Pato as Gizab, ERM, AC301-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Nili District of Daykundi Province, 23 June 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁵¹⁴ ERM, AC301-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Nili District of Daykundi Province, 23 June 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁵¹⁵ Afghanistan, Ministry of Interior Affairs, 15 Taliban Terrorists killed in Daikundi, 1 January 2020, [url](#); Reportedly, Taliban Holding 57 Hostage in Daykundi: Officials, 20 June 2020, [url](#); Kabul Now, Taliban take 53 civilians as hostages in Daikundi province, 20 June 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Four Afghan Security Forces, 12 Taliban Insurgents Killed in Daikundi Clash, 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁶ AP, 3 Policemen Die in Attacks on Afghan Police Chief, Governor, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁷ Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 21 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁸ Afghanistan Times, Four Afghan Security Forces, 12 Taliban Insurgents Killed in Daikundi Clash, 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁹ Khaama Press, Taliban Kill 3 Children in Daykundi, 31 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁰ Afghanistan Times, Four Afghan Security Forces, 12 Taliban Insurgents Killed in Daikundi Clash, 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵²¹ Afghanistan Times, Five Key Taliban Members Detained in Daikundi, 10 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵²² LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#), accessed 28 February 2021. The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the map was updated.

by the government, 11 478 in the areas under the Taliban control, and 11 478 in the areas not controlled by either side.¹⁵²³

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Daykundi province decreased by 6 %.¹⁵²⁴

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Daykundi was under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps. Daykundi province is included in the Train, Advise and Assist Command - South (TAAC-S), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-S is led by US forces and has its headquarters in Kandahar province.¹⁵²⁵

2.7.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 72 civilian casualties (42 deaths and 30 injured) in Daykundi province, which was an increase of 3 % compared to 2019. The leading causes of civilian casualties were non-suicide IEDs, followed by ground engagements and aerial operations.¹⁵²⁶

According to ACLED data, between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021 there were 25 security incidents recorded in Daykundi province, of which 12 were coded as 'battles', nine as 'explosions/remote violence,' and four as 'violence against civilians.' It must be noted that ACLED does not include Pato district in the list of Daykundi districts and therefore the incidents that took place in Pato are not reflected in ACLED data.¹⁵²⁷

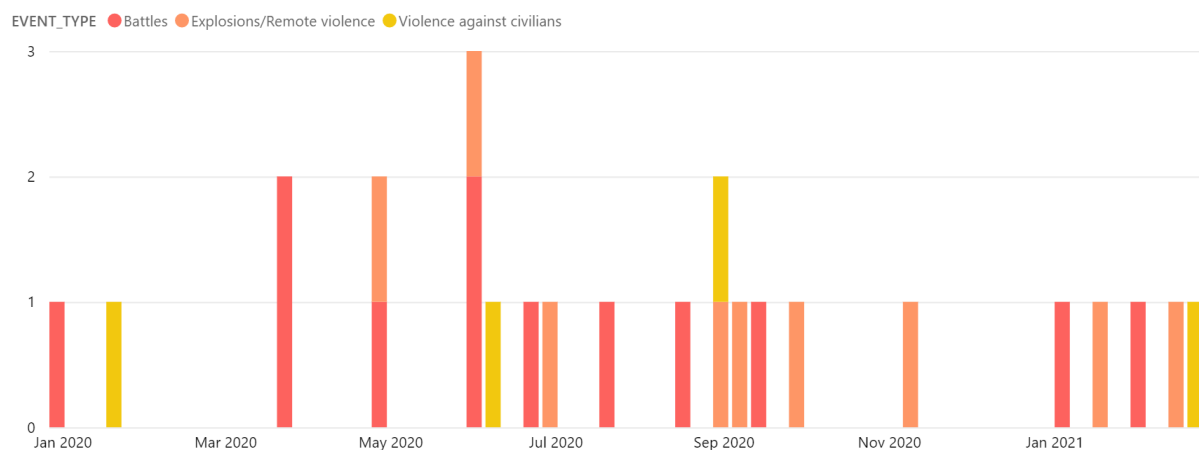


Figure 14: Daykundi province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁵²⁸

¹⁵²³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#). For this survey, Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephone interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country.

¹⁵²⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁵²⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁵²⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

¹⁵²⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Daykundi province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Daykundi province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

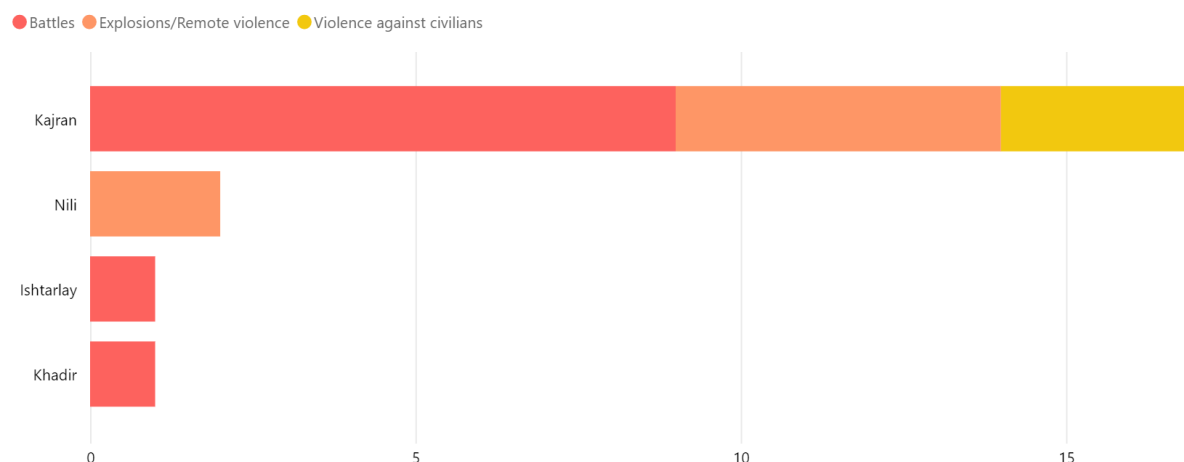


Figure 15: Daykundi province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁵²⁹

The majority of ‘battles’ concerned ‘armed clashes.’¹⁵³⁰ Examples of such incidents include an attack on military or police checkpoints in Khadir (Kando) district in March 2020¹⁵³¹ and an attack by the Taliban on an ANDSF checkpoint in Tamzan area of Pato district, during which four police personnel and 12 Taliban militants were killed, in July 2020.¹⁵³² In August 2020, the Taliban conducted an attack on a security outpost in the Dara Zin village of Pato district, which resulted in the killing of five pro-government militiamen and the injuring of six; the insurgents looted all weapons and equipment of the outpost;¹⁵³³ in February 2021, at least one security force member was reportedly killed and another injured in the Taliban attack over a security outpost in Tapa Poor area of Kajran.¹⁵³⁴

ACLED recorded five incidents of ‘explosions/remote violence’ in Kajran district and four in Nili district; ‘remote explosives/landmines/IEDs’ were the cause of three incidents in Kajran and all four in Nili.¹⁵³⁵ The instances involving remote violence, as reported by media source include the following: in April 2020, a car of a provincial police chief hit a roadside IED, causing casualties among ANP members;¹⁵³⁶ in June 2020, two civilians were killed in an explosion of a Taliban-planted landmine in Kajran;¹⁵³⁷ in September 2020, at least 14 civilians were killed and 4 injured after their vehicle hit a roadside bomb planted by Taliban in Dasht-e Sulayman village of Kajran district;¹⁵³⁸ in February 2021, 5 security forces members were killed and 2 injured when a military vehicle hit a roadside IED in Tangai-Soof area in Kajran district.¹⁵³⁹

During the EASO reporting period, local media reported on cases involving abduction of civilians in Daykundi. Thus, in January 2020, Taliban militants were reported to abduct two drivers who were transporting food after looting their trucks; the drivers were later released.¹⁵⁴⁰ In June 2020, in

¹⁵²⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Daykundi province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 4 events (1 battles, 2 remote violence and 1 violence against civilians) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

¹⁵³⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Daykundi province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Police Killed, 8 Injured in Daikundi Clash, 29 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³² Afghanistan Times, Four Afghan Security Forces, 12 Taliban Insurgents Killed in Daikundi Clash, 12 July 2020, [url](#); TKG, Daikundi: Taliban Storms Security Outpost, Kills 4 Afghan Forces, 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁴ Reportedly, One Security Force Killed in Taliban’s Overnight Attack in Daikundi, 6 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Daykundi province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁶ AP, 3 Policemen Die in Attacks on Afghan Police Chief, Governor, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁷ Bakhtar News Agency, Mine Blast Took the Lives of Two Civilians, 2 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁸ Tolonews, Blast in Daikundi Kills 14 Civilians: Interior Ministry, 29 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁹ Afghanistan Times, 7 Security Force Members Killed in Daikundi, Herat Blasts, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Rebels Accused of Looting Food-Laden Trucks, 24 January 2020, [url](#)

Gharma village of Kajran district, the Taliban took hostage 53 civilians who were travelling on Daykundi-Kandahar highway: reportedly, the aim of the militants was to locate a couple who had escaped from the Taliban in Uruzgan province;¹⁵⁴¹ the Taliban denied their involvement in the incident.¹⁵⁴² In August 2020, local media reported that three children aged 10, 13, and 15 were killed by the Taliban, after they were abducted from Selmanji village of Kajran district a week before.¹⁵⁴³

As reported by Kabul Now on 5 September 2020, the Taliban was conducting attacks in Daykundi and other Hazara-populated areas of Afghanistan ahead of the peace talks in Doha. According to a Hazara leader, around 67 people were killed in Taliban attacks in Pato district in two weeks prior the reporting.¹⁵⁴⁴

As reported by UNAMA, in January 2021, the Taliban set fire to a healthcare centre for women located in Daykundi and planted IEDs on the road to the centre 'in order to prevent women from accessing services funded by non-Muslims.'¹⁵⁴⁵

In January 2021, the Taliban reportedly destroyed 'a Salam network antenna' in Qasemadad village in Kajran, injuring a guard.¹⁵⁴⁶

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 31 December 2020, reporting 7 843 persons displaced from Daykundi, of which 6 917 were displaced within the province. During the same period, 415 persons were displaced to Uruzgan, 301 persons to the province of Kabul, 103 persons to Helmand, 73 persons to Herat province, and 34 persons to Ghor.¹⁵⁴⁷

According to UNOCHA data on conflict-induced displacements, the internal displacement within the province occurred in August and September 2020, comprising 14 persons displaced from Pato to Nili and 700 persons displaced within Pato district in August 2020 and 6 203 persons displaced within Pato in September 2020.¹⁵⁴⁸

In September 2020, UNOCHA noted that some inhabitants of Gizab district, Uruzgan province, were reportedly displaced to Daykundi due to the clashes between ANDSF and an NSAG.¹⁵⁴⁹ According to UNOCHA data on conflict-induced displacements, 6 215 persons were displaced from Khasuruzgan district of Uruzgan province to Pato district of Daykundi in October 2020.¹⁵⁵⁰

The Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR), reported for the period 5 November 2020 – 7 January 2021 that the clashes between the Taliban and ANDSF in Daykundi and Helmand led to the displacement to Herat city.¹⁵⁵¹ According to UNOCHA data, the displacement from Daykundi comprised 15 IDPs from Kajran to Herat in February 2021 and 14 IDPs from Khadir to Herat in March 2021.¹⁵⁵²

¹⁵⁴¹ Kabul Now, Taliban takes 53 civilians as hostages in Daikundi province, 20 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴² Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on: 20 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴³ Khaama Press, Taliban Kill 3 Children in Daykundi, 31 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁴ Kabul Now, Taliban launch offensives on Hazara populated areas ahead of peace talks, 5 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 36

¹⁵⁴⁶ Bakhtar News Agency, Taliban Destroyed Telecommunication Antenna in Daikundi, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 – 27 September 2020, 30 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

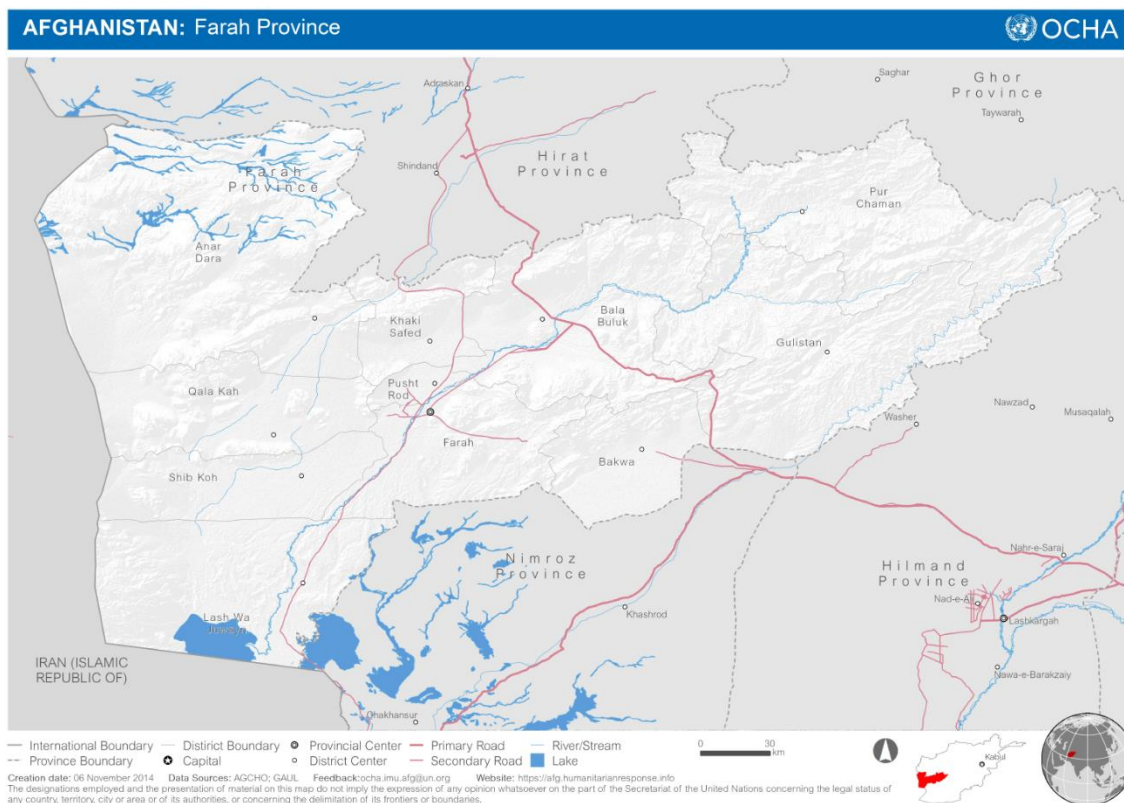
¹⁵⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵¹ DACAAR, ERM, 15 Household Assessment Report, 20 January 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁵⁵² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, 25 April 2021, [url](#)

2.8 Farah

2.8.1 General description of the province



Map 8: Afghanistan – Farah province, source: UNOCHA¹⁵⁵³

Basic geography: the province of Farah is located in the western part of Afghanistan and borders Herat to the north, Ghor to the north-east, Helmand to the south-east and Nimroz to the south, as well as Iran to the west.¹⁵⁵⁴ Farah province is divided into the following administrative units: Anar Dara, Bakwa, Bala Buluk, Farah, Gulistan, Khak-e Safed, Lash-e Juwayn, Pur Chaman, Pushtud, Qala-i Kah (formerly Pusht-Koh) and Shib Koh. The provincial capital of Farah is Farah.¹⁵⁵⁵

Population estimates: Afghanistan NSIA estimated the population of Farah at 553 058 in 2019-20.¹⁵⁵⁶

Ethnicity: the majority of Farah's inhabitants are Pashtuns, with Tajik and smaller Hazara communities residing mainly in the countryside.¹⁵⁵⁷ There are also Aylat, Mugal, Sadat, Bomodi, Aymaq, Barahawi and Baloch tribes living in Farah.¹⁵⁵⁸

Mobility/road infrastructure: part of the Ring Road leads through Farah, connecting the province with the regional centre of Herat in the north and the provinces of Nimroz and Helmand in the south and south-east, respectively.¹⁵⁵⁹ Cross-border transport and trade with Iran is reportedly possible at

¹⁵⁵³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Farah Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Farah Province District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁵ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Farah, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, n.d., [url](#), p. 43

¹⁵⁵⁶ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2019-20, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 39

¹⁵⁵⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Farah, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁸ US Naval Postgraduate School, Farah Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁹ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

Abu Nasr Farahi port.¹⁵⁶⁰ In September 2018, Tolonews reported security problems near the border crossing, as the route towards the border led through militant-controlled areas.¹⁵⁶¹ In April 2020, UNODC cited [drug] traffickers in Farah province confirming Taliban presence on the trafficking route between Farah and Nimroz, between Farah and Helmand and between Farah and Iran.¹⁵⁶² According to Afghan Civil Aviation Authority report of November 2020, there is an airport in Farah, which is located two nautical miles South East of Farah City.¹⁵⁶³ On 25 January 2021, Tolonews cited Nasir Ahmad Ghoryani, the industry and commerce minister stating that Qatar businesspeople aimed at converting the [Farah] provincial airfield into an international airport.¹⁵⁶⁴ Kam Air, Afghan private travel airline, indicated that it provides two flights per week between Kabul and Farah.¹⁵⁶⁵

2.8.2 Conflict background and actors in Farah

Farah province is viewed by AGEs as a corridor between Afghanistan's southern and western regions. The 285 km border with Iran makes Farah a junction for various kinds of legal and illegal markets, as well as cross-border smuggling. As a result, Farah is highly profitable and strategically important for AGEs and criminal groups.¹⁵⁶⁶

According to AAN, the Taliban were never fully defeated after 2001 and kept a strong presence in Farah province – especially in Bala Buluk.¹⁵⁶⁷ In February 2018, the Washington Post stated that approximately 60 % of Farah was controlled by insurgents, while the government controlled only the provincial capital and 10 district centres, some of which are allegedly too dangerous for district officials to visit.¹⁵⁶⁸ In August 2019, Etilaatroz cited a former local commander indicating that the Taliban have a widespread presence in the remote areas of Farah province. The source also cited Shah Mahmood Naimi, member of provincial council of Farah province, stating [informal translation] 'Taliban maintain entire control over Khak-e Safed, Shib Koh, Bakwa, Gulistan, Bala Buluk districts including all highways, and in the remaining districts, the government control is limited within three kilometres (from the capital of the districts).' Naimi further stated 'currently, the Taliban commute even during the day in the remote areas of the city.' According to the source, Farah police confirms Taliban's presence in three districts, government's control over Highway One, and Taliban's control over certain roads due to the lack of security forces.¹⁵⁶⁹ Another source indicated that Taliban operate in a number of districts of Farah province.¹⁵⁷⁰

On 7 January 2020, Afghanistan Times reported that the government claimed having cleared several villages from Taliban presence 'in outskirts of Farah City and in Bala Buluk and Qala-i Kah districts'.¹⁵⁷¹ While on 20 January 2020, Kabul Now news cited Abdul Sattar Hussaini, a Member of the Afghan Parliament, stating that the Taliban established a Friday black market in Farah province where the

¹⁵⁶⁰ Tolonews, Import Ban Affects Business In Farah Port, 21 September 2018, [url](#); IRNA, Afghanistan opens Farah border to Iranian goods, 4 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶¹ Tolonews, Import Ban Affects Business In Farah Port, 21 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶² UNODC, AOTP update, 'voices of Quchaqbar', understand the opiate trafficking in Afghanistan from the perspective of drug traffickers, 22 April 2020, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁵⁶³ Afghanistan, ACAA, Aeronautical Information Publication, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁴ Tolonews, Qataris eye more investment in Farah: minister, 25 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁵ Kam Air, Book flight, Kam Air news, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁶ International organisation, e-mail, 14 September 2017. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

¹⁵⁶⁷ Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁸ Washington Post (The), Outgunned in urban centers, Taliban wages fierce fight in remote western Afghanistan, 26 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁹ Etilaatroz, بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه [informal translation: 'security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban's mobility to heavy losses of the group'], 30 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁰ Ariana News, Afghan forces retreat from Anar Darah district of Farah province, 7 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷¹ Afghanistan Times, Several villages of Farah purged of Taliban presence, 7 January 2020, [url](#)

group sold weapons seized from the ANDSF.¹⁵⁷² In March 2020, Taliban reportedly closed the Farah-Herat Highway.¹⁵⁷³ On 10 May 2020, local media reported that former chief police of Farah province joined the Taliban.¹⁵⁷⁴ According to the UN Security Council report, as of 27 May 2020, the Taliban shadow governor for Farah was Mullah Mashar. The source also indicated that the former shadow governor for Farah province, Mullah Abdul Bari, was killed in an air strike in early August 2019.¹⁵⁷⁵ A local news also reported on the incident.¹⁵⁷⁶

A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021¹⁵⁷⁷ designated 19.27 % of Farah's territory under government control, 79.55 % under Taliban control and 1.18 % under the control of no side. According to the same survey, 108 510 of Farah's inhabitants lived in areas under government control, 447 862 of the province's population lived in areas under Taliban control and 6 654 lived in areas controlled by neither side.¹⁵⁷⁸

As of 28 February 2021, assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Anar Dara, Khak-e Safed, Bala Buluk, Gulistan and Sahib Koh districts as 'Taliban-control', and Qala-i Kah, Pushtrud, Bakwa, Pur Chaman and Farah districts as 'contested'. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Qala-i Kah and Bakwa districts shifted to 'Taliban control'.¹⁵⁷⁹ In May 2021, following Taliban's deadly assaults on three ANDSF bases (located on Herat-Kandahar highway) in Bala Buluk district,¹⁵⁸⁰ ANDSF evacuated two of them on 7 May 2021 (one in Shawn and the other in Pastoo Khan), which were then looted by the Taliban fighters and locals,¹⁵⁸¹ and the other one fell in the hands of Taliban earlier on 3 May 2021.¹⁵⁸²

On 25 February 2021, Salaam Times cited Abdul Aziz Baig, provincial chairman for Farah province, stating that Iran-backed Taliban were mostly active in Farah province,¹⁵⁸³ where the police intercepted two tonnes of explosives being sent by Iran to the Taliban.¹⁵⁸⁴ According to the UN report of March 2021, the Taliban kept pressure on vulnerable provincial capitals including on Farah province.¹⁵⁸⁵

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Farah province increased by 47 %.¹⁵⁸⁶

In terms of government presence, the 207th Zafar Corps is in charge of the ANA operations in the province of Farah.¹⁵⁸⁷ As part of the RS Mission, Italian forces provide 'functionality-based' security assistance to ANA 207th Corps and ANP in Farah province.¹⁵⁸⁸ In January 2021, Tolonews cited

¹⁵⁷² Kabul Now, Taliban retail weapons of Afghan forces in Farah, 20 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Militants close Herat-Farah highway for traffic, 19 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Former police chief joins Taliban in Farah, 10 May 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Interior minister reacts to as former chief of Farah joins Taliban, 10 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁵ United Nations (UN) Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 10 and 27

¹⁵⁷⁶ Ariana News, 103 militants including Taliban shadow governor killed in Farah, 4 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁷ For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephone interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country; Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#).

¹⁵⁷⁹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁰ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 4 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸¹ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 7 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸² Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 3 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸³ Salaam Times, Taliban reportedly pledged water access to Iran in return for support, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁴ Salaam Times, Farah police seize 2 tonnes of Iranian explosives on way to Taliban, 27 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁵ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General, A/75/811-S/2021/252, 12 March 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁵⁸⁶ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁵⁸⁷ Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

Massoud Andarabi, Afghan interior minister, stating that a new ANA, ANP and NDS combined unit has been created and used as a trial in Farah province to act against AGEs.¹⁵⁸⁹

2.8.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 114 civilian casualties, including 59 killed and 55 injured in Farah province, which represents a 22 % decrease compared to 2019. The leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, non-suicide IEDs and targeted killings.¹⁵⁹⁰ According to SIGAR, RS recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Farah province during the first quarter of 2020¹⁵⁹¹, and the mentioned source recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020.¹⁵⁹² During the second half of 2020, no RS information on civilian casualties per province was available in SIGAR quarterly reports.¹⁵⁹³

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data from reports in open sources on 164 incidents related to insurgents in Farah province, of which 93 were coded as 'battles', 57 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 14 as 'violence against civilians'.¹⁵⁹⁴

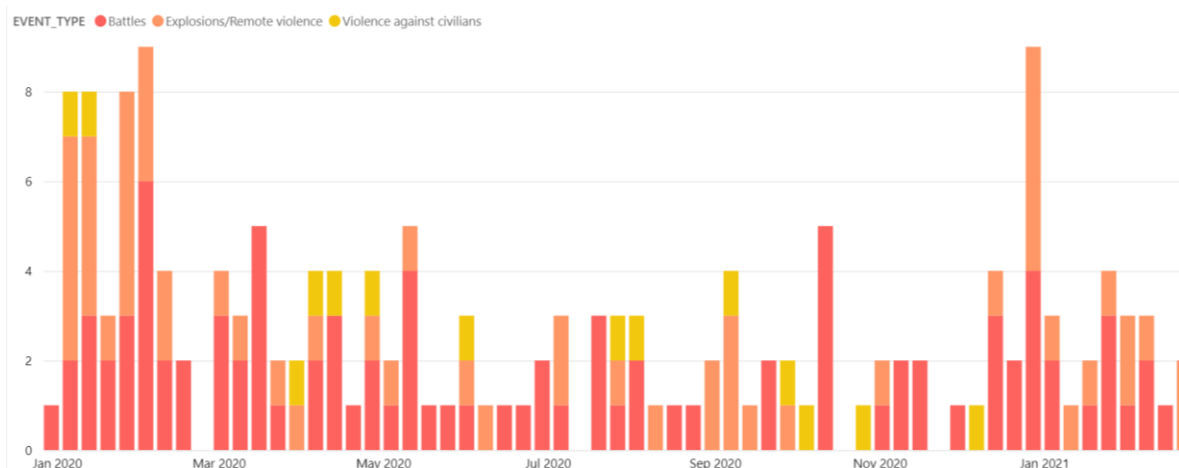


Figure 16: Farah province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁵⁹⁵

¹⁵⁸⁹ Tolonews, New Security forces become active: Minister, 4 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

¹⁵⁹¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

¹⁵⁹² SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹⁵⁹³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Farah province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Farah province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

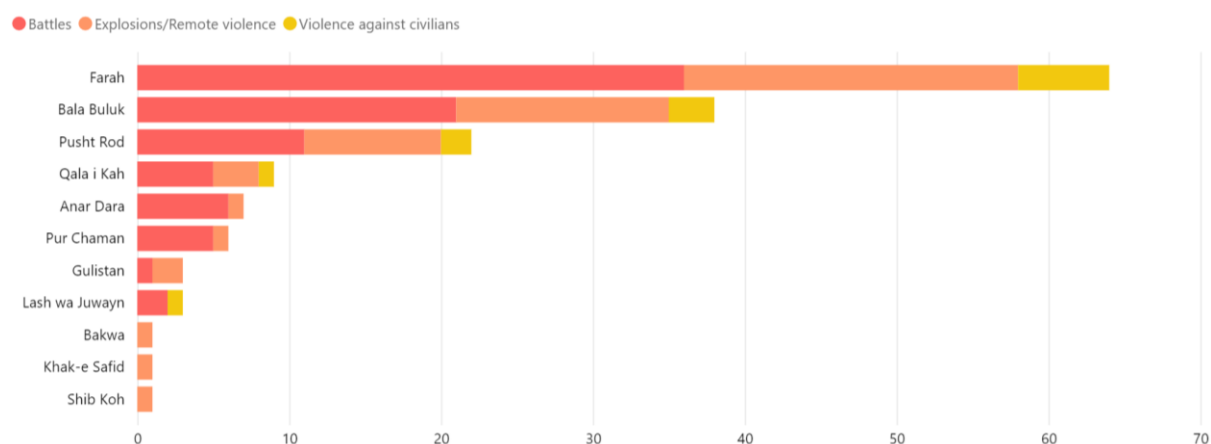


Figure 17: Farah province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁵⁹⁶

Of the battles, nearly all concerned ‘armed clashes’. The majority of these armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS personnel.¹⁵⁹⁷

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.¹⁵⁹⁸ In May 2020, several armed clashes took place between the Taliban and the ANDSF in Farah province¹⁵⁹⁹, including intense fighting in parts of Farah province in June 2020.¹⁶⁰⁰

Roadside bombs or IEDs represented around 9 % of all reported security incidents in Farah.¹⁶⁰¹

Shelling, artillery and missile attacks by the Taliban represented 5 % of all registered incidents in Farah.¹⁶⁰² On 12 May 2020, four children were killed by a mortar attack hitting a house in Bala Buluk district.¹⁶⁰³

During the reporting period, air/drone strikes represented 18 % of all registered incidents in Farah.¹⁶⁰⁴ On 9 February 2020, five civilians, who were businessmen, were killed in an airstrike while travelling from Farah City to Abu Nasar Farahi port.¹⁶⁰⁵

ACLED categorised 7 % of all violent events recorded in Farah as ‘violence against civilians’.¹⁶⁰⁶ These incidents involved for instance: on 10 April 2020, unknown gunmen killed a religious scholar in Farah province;¹⁶⁰⁷ on 1 July 2020, Kabul Now cited Muhibullah Muhib, spokesman for Farah police chief, stating that a schoolteacher named Hamidullah Rahmani was killed by the Taliban in Dehak village of

¹⁵⁹⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Farah province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 9 events (6 battles, 2 remote violence and 1 violence against civilians) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

¹⁵⁹⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Farah province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Farah province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁰ Ariana News, Taliban attacks intensified in most parts of Afghanistan recently, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Farah province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Farah province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰³ Afghanistan Times, four children killed in Farah mortar attacks, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Farah province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁵ Tolonews, Farah officials claim civilians were killed in airstrike, 9 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Farah province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, religious scholar gunned down in Farah, 10 April 2020, [url](#)

Farah City;¹⁶⁰⁸ on 8 October 2020, in Lash-e Juwayn district, the Taliban kidnapped a boy and his two adult sisters who were on their way to visit their sick father and took them to an unknown area. The following day, their dead bodies were found;¹⁶⁰⁹ on 14 December 2020 Tolonews cited Afghan officials reporting that Mawlawi Ghulam Sakhi, imam of a mosque in Lash-e Juwayn district of Farah, was shot and killed by the Taliban’;¹⁶¹⁰ while according to a New York Times report, Mawlawi Ghulam Sakhi was killed by unknown gunmen.¹⁶¹¹

The WHO registered two incidents related to health care provision in Farah province in 2020 including the damage of two health centres and the closure of another.¹⁶¹² On 21 January 2020, Shia News Association indicated [informal translation] ‘the Afghan Minister of Public Health stated that during the past year, over 50 health centres have been destroyed during the conflicts in Afghanistan and 112 others were closed down due to the conflict, in particular in Farah and Nangarhar provinces’.¹⁶¹³

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data from the period 1 January – 28 February 2021, reporting 13 826 persons displaced from Farah province, with 81 % displaced within the province itself (mainly in Farah, the provincial capital), 14 % displaced into Nimroz and the remaining 5 % displaced into Herat.¹⁶¹⁴

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January – 28 February 2021, reporting 11 287 persons displaced to Farah province, with 100 % coming from within the province itself.¹⁶¹⁵

According to UNOCHA, security situation in the West of Afghanistan including in Farah province remained tense and unstable in July,¹⁶¹⁶ October,¹⁶¹⁷ and December 2020,¹⁶¹⁸ January¹⁶¹⁹ and February 2021¹⁶²⁰ with continued reports of IED attacks, illegal checkpoints and military operations in the West of Afghanistan including in Farah provinces.¹⁶²¹

¹⁶⁰⁸ Kabul Now, School teacher shot dead by Taliban in Farah province, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 32

¹⁶¹⁰ Tolonews, Imam of the mosque killed by “Taliban”: official, 14 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶¹¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 31 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶¹² WHO, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (January 01 - December 31, 2020), 11 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶¹³ Shia News Association, [unofficial translation] ‘Health Ministry: in the past one year, 50 health centres have been destroyed, 21 January 2020’, [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 28 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 28 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 – 19 July 2020), 23 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (19 – 25 October 2020), 28 October 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 – 20 December 2020), 23 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

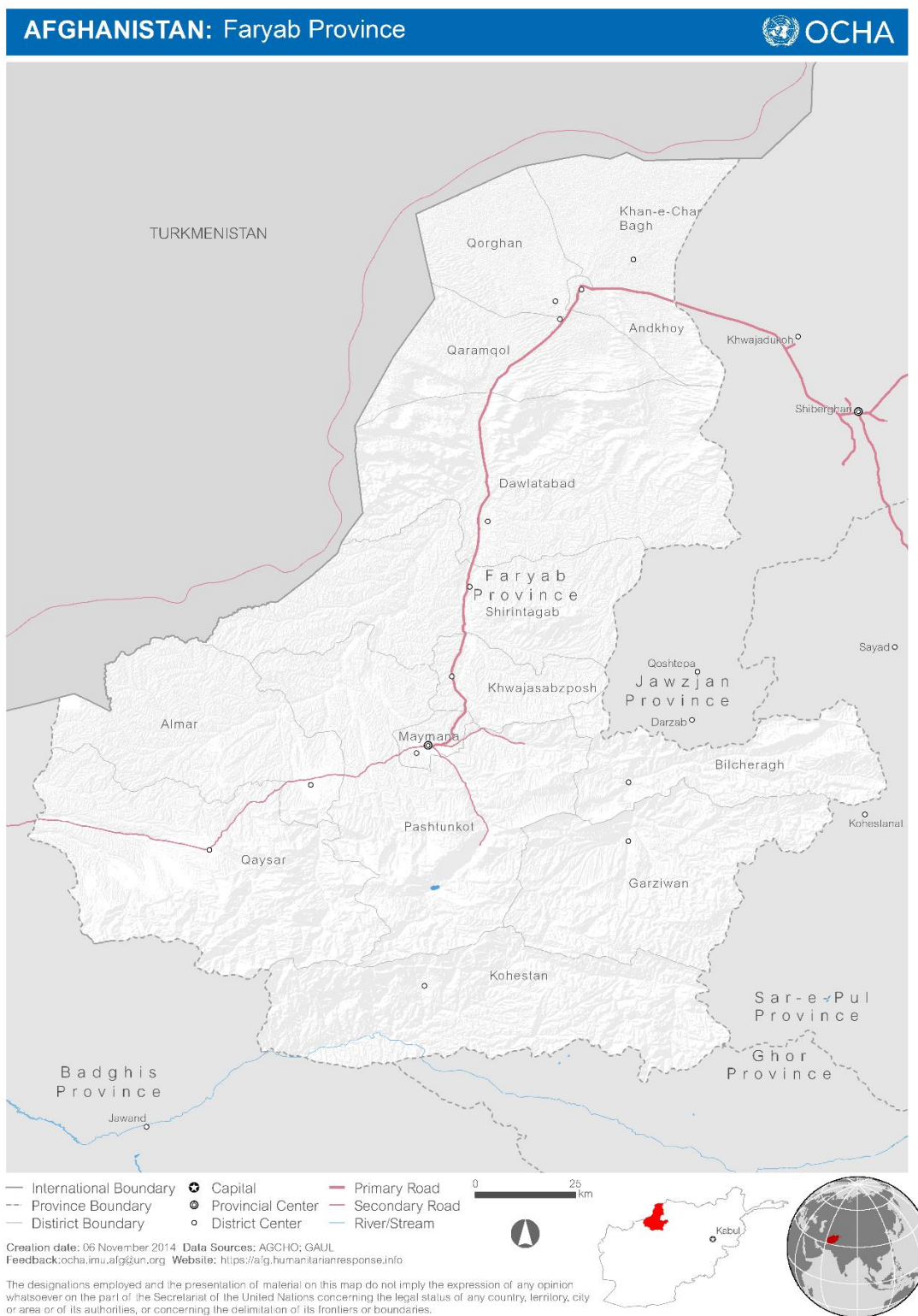
¹⁶¹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 – 31 January 2021), 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶²⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (8 – 14 February 2021), 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (15 – 21 February 2021), 24 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶²¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 – 31 January 2021), 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

2.9 Faryab

2.9.1 General description of the province



Map 9: Afghanistan – Faryab province, source: UNOCHA¹⁶²²

¹⁶²² UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 8

Faryab province is located in the north-western part of Afghanistan and is divided into the following districts: Almar, Andkhoy, Bilcheragh, Dawlatabad, Garziwan, Khan-e Char Bagh, Khwajasabzposh, Kohestan, Maymana, Pashtunkot, Qaramqol, Qaysar, Qorghon, Shirintagab.¹⁶²³ The provincial capital is Maymana. According to UNODC, the district of Ghormach became part of Faryab in 2017.¹⁶²⁴ In August 2018, the Peshawar-based daily newspaper, Frontier Post noted that Ghormach's administrative affairs would be shifted back to Badghis due to security reasons.¹⁶²⁵ The administrative belonging of Ghormach seems to be disputed. Afghanistan Analysts Network reported in 2017 that the central government had already transferred Ghormach to Faryab in 2007, while the governor of Faryab did not consider Ghormach to be part of Faryab in 2010.¹⁶²⁶ In 2018, AAN stated that Ghormach had been 'temporarily transferred' to Faryab according to a list of Afghanistan's district numbers which was jointly published by the Central Statistics Organization and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG).¹⁶²⁷ The 2020/21 population estimation of the Afghan NSIA, as well as the publication of the 2019 presidential election results by the Independent Election Commission again listed Ghormach as part of Badghis.¹⁶²⁸

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1 089 228, 93 706 of whom live in the provincial capital, Maymana.¹⁶²⁹

The main ethnic group in the province are Uzbeks.¹⁶³⁰ Other groups present include Tajiks, Aimaqs, Pashtuns, Hazara, Moghol and other smaller ethnicities,¹⁶³¹ such as the Magats in Maymana and Andkhoy districts.¹⁶³²

The Ring Road connects Maymana with neighbouring Jawzjan and the regional centre Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province to the east (crossing Khan-e-Char Bagh, Andkhoy, Qaramqol, Dawlatabad, Shirintagab and Khwajasabzposh districts) and Badghis province to the west (crossing Almar, Pashtunkot and Qaysar districts).¹⁶³³ According to UNOCHA, the road between Andkhoy district and provincial capital Maymana remained contested in January and February 2020. AGEs had control and were taxing commercial and logistic vehicles.¹⁶³⁴ The control of the road by this group impacted civilian movement as well.¹⁶³⁵ Military sources and a senior analyst described the Maymana-Jawzjan highway as having been closed¹⁶³⁶ or 'in trouble'¹⁶³⁷ for the previous three years. According to a local civil society representative, in January 2021, there was a travel ban for common people on the roads

¹⁶²³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Faryab Province District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#), p. 2; Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 39

¹⁶²⁴ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#); UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁶²⁵ Frontier Post (The), Ghormach falls to Taliban as ANA troops move to Maimana, 28 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁶ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁷ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁸ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 39, 41; Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Faryab, 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-20, 18 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 3, 35

¹⁶³⁰ RFE/RL/Gandhara, In A Return To Moral Policing, Taliban And Clerics Ban Music In Afghan Province, 22 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶³¹ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile Faryab province, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶³² Hossaini, K. and Ruttig, T., Citizens, Finally, But No Place to Settle: The Magats, one of Afghanistan's most marginalised minorities, AAN, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶³³ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#); MSF, Afghanistan Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#), pp. 1; 3; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁶³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶³⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (10 February – 16 February 2020), 19 February 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶³⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 of a family killed, 6 wounded in Faryab blitz, 19 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁷ Watkins, A. (@and_huh_what), [Twitter], posted on: 17 March 2020, [url](#)

in Faryab between 4.00pm and 7.00am, while transport company representatives complained that vehicles were not allowed to drive on Maymana-Andhkoy road between 5.00am and 8.00am.¹⁶³⁸ Maymana airport is located less than 1 km of Maymana city,¹⁶³⁹ in Maymana district.¹⁶⁴⁰ As of March 2021, scheduled passenger services between Maymana and Kabul were provided.¹⁶⁴¹ Another small airport in Faryab is located in Andkhoy district,¹⁶⁴² however no information on its activities and services was available.

2.9.2 Conflict background and actors in Faryab

According to AAN, '[...] Faryab is strategically important as it connects the western parts of the country with the north – it was through Faryab that the Taliban moved to capture Mazar-e Sharif in 1997 and 1998 and from where anti-Taliban forces came to re-capture the city in 2001.'¹⁶⁴³

AAN links the Taliban's success in Faryab from 2007 onwards to 'local Jamiati-Jombesh rivalries, poppy-cultivation interests and radical propaganda by religious preachers, coupled with the absolute inconsistency of government outreach'¹⁶⁴⁴ as well as the exploitation of local land and water conflicts and the rearmament of local commanders.¹⁶⁴⁵ According to AAN, fighting broke out between local pro-government militias in early 2018, which further weakened the resistance against AGEs.¹⁶⁴⁶

In March 2018, AAN described how the Taliban became increasingly successful in the province after drawing on local fighters – which is a change in strategy compared to the Taliban's approach before 2001. Since 2008, Faryab's Taliban shadow governors have been mostly Uzbeks and also a majority of the Taliban district officers are Uzbeks in districts with an Uzbek majority, along with a few Tajiks. Pashtuns serve on mid-level posts in the districts of Qaysar, Dawlatabad, and Shirintagab where Pashtuns form a considerable share of the population.¹⁶⁴⁷ However, AAN reported that the strategy of endorsement towards non-Pashtun ethnic groups among Faryab's Taliban limited the group's organisational capacity as some Pashtun Taliban commanders ignored instructions of Uzbek shadow governors. In order to avoid tensions, the then shadow governor allegedly deployed a strategy of individual smaller operations by each group in their own areas instead of joint operations with larger numbers of fighters.¹⁶⁴⁸

General Abdul Rashid Dostum, Jombesh party leader and self-proclaimed sole representative of the Uzbek minority in Afghanistan, allegedly perceived the Taliban outreach to Uzbek communities as a threat. Subsequently, Dostum put considerable effort in combatting the Taliban influence on Uzbek communities in Faryab and led several counteroffensives of pro-government (Jombesh) militias together with the ANSF throughout 2015 and 2016. According to AAN, there were 'some initial

¹⁶³⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 90pc of Faryab areas under Taliban's control, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁹ Afghanistan, ACAA, Aerodrome (AD) Part 3, AIP Edition 90, 5 November 2020, [url](#), p. 375

¹⁶⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Faryab Province District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁶⁴¹ KamAir, Route Map – domestic flights, n.d., [url](#); Flightsfrom.com, Maimana Airport (MMZ), n.d., [url](#); Airportia, RQ161 Flight Status Kam Air: Kabul to Afghanistan (KMF161) n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁴² MSF, Afghanistan Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#), p. 3; Afghanistan, ACAA, All airports, 24 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴³ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁴ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, AAN, 3 July 2015, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁵ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁶ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁷ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, AAN, 3 July 2015, [url](#); Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁸ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

successes, but no significant long-term results'. Local government forces and pro-government militias have however not been able to hold most of the areas after Dostum moved out of Faryab.¹⁶⁴⁹ According to analyst Deedee Derksen, Dostum's remobilising of local militias might have strengthened the Taliban in the long run, as large numbers of militiamen formerly affiliated to Dostum might have defected to the Taliban after their funding by Dostum dried up.¹⁶⁵⁰

An Afghanistan analyst contacted by the Swedish Migration Agency in January 2020, considered Faryab, together with Sar-e Pul, to be the most Taliban-controlled or influenced provinces in the northern region.¹⁶⁵¹ As of 12 March 2021 the assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Bilcheragh, Kohestan, Pashtunkot, Qaramqol and Shirintagab districts as 'Taliban-controlled', Andkhoy and Khan-e Char Bagh districts as 'government-controlled' and the remaining districts in Faryab province as 'contested'. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Pashtunkot, Kohestan and Qaramqol districts shifted to 'contested'.¹⁶⁵² A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021¹⁶⁵³ designated 23.05 % of Faryab's territory under government control and 76.95 % under Taliban control, with the Taliban not fully controlling any of the districts in Faryab. According to the same survey, 255 716 of Faryab's inhabitants lived in areas under government control, while 853 507 of the province's population lived in areas under Taliban control.¹⁶⁵⁴ In January 2021 some residents, Provincial Council members and civil society activists told Pajhwok Afghan News that the Taliban controlled up to 90 % over Faryab province, with security forces only in control of district centres. Government and military officials denied this, however, claiming that a recent operation had been successful in reopening the highway and recapturing strategic areas in several of Faryab's districts.¹⁶⁵⁵

According to information available to the UN Security Council in 2020, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) operated mainly in Faryab and Jawzjan provinces where it maintained links to splinter groups such as Islamic Jihad Group and Khatiba Imama al-Bukhari.¹⁶⁵⁶ In 2019, IMU was reported to have no more than 100 members, overall in Afghanistan.¹⁶⁵⁷ In its contribution to the UN Security Council early 2021 report, the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reported that approximately 100 fighters of the Central Asian Islamic Jihad Group, with ties both to al-Qaeda and the Taliban,¹⁶⁵⁸ were active in Kunduz and Faryab provinces.¹⁶⁵⁹

¹⁶⁴⁹ Ali, O. and Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁰ War on the Rocks, In Afghanistan, Today's Pro-Government Militias Could Be Tomorrow's Insurgents, 11 December 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵¹ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁶⁵² LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated. For more information on the methodology used by, see the Introduction section of this report.

¹⁶⁵³ Through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires, Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed a total of 1 266 respondents for this survey, randomly selected across the country. Pajhwok acknowledges the complexity of this task and the possible inaccuracy of the provided information.

¹⁶⁵⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 90pc of Faryab areas under Taliban's control, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁶ UN Security Council, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para 85

¹⁶⁵⁷ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 13 June 2019, [url](#), para 72

¹⁶⁵⁸ Modern Diplomacy, Why Central Asian Jihadists are Inspired by the US-Taliban Agreement?, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁹ UN Security Council, Twenty-Seventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities, 3 February 2021, [url](#), para. 66

According to information submitted to the UN Secretary-General for the February 2020 report, ISKP had a covert presence in Faryab province, consisting of a group of up to 25 members, led by Qari Salahuddin, who was formerly with the Taliban.¹⁶⁶⁰ In May 2020, provincial officials expressed concern about ISKP affiliates, recruiting and looking for strengthening its position in Faryab province after the US-Taliban deal.¹⁶⁶¹ However in its contribution to the UN Security Council early 2021 report, the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team did not mention ISKP presence in Faryab¹⁶⁶² and no security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in the province between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021.¹⁶⁶³

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Faryab province increased by 98 %.¹⁶⁶⁴

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Faryab province was reported to be under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps¹⁶⁶⁵ and included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North was led by German forces and had its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.¹⁶⁶⁶ Following the February 2020 US-Taliban deal one of the US military bases that closed in the course of 2020 was Maymana in Faryab province.¹⁶⁶⁷

In addition to regular government forces, members of pro-government militias or so-called Arbaki and local uprising forces¹⁶⁶⁸ were present in Faryab province and regular targets in Taliban attacks.¹⁶⁶⁹ After ALP funding came to an end on 30 September 2020, the official ALP *tashkil* (the approved size and structure) reduced from about 400 to 250 members in Faryab, according to AAN research.¹⁶⁷⁰ Upon hearing the news of the killing of one of his close aides or former commanders, police chief Safar Raees Baidar, in a Taliban attack in Qaramqol district, Dostum reportedly arrived in Faryab province in November 2020 to take the lead in the fight against the Taliban.¹⁶⁷¹ Several sources reported on Dostum's involvement in the fight against the Taliban in Faryab's Qaramqol district in January 2021.¹⁶⁷²

¹⁶⁶⁰ UN Security Council, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2020/95, 4 February 2020, [url](#), para 34

¹⁶⁶¹ Afghanistan Times, Daesh may be regaining strength in Faryab, 9 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶² UN Security Council, Twenty-Seventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities, 3 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Faryab province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁶⁶⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 50

¹⁶⁶⁶ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁶⁶⁷ CSIS, 1 December 2020, The Biden Transition and the Real Impact of U.S. Force Cuts in Afghanistan [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁸ For more information on Arbaki and uprising forces, see section 1.2.1. of this report.

¹⁶⁶⁹ Reportedly, Over 50 Casualties Reported In Faryab Clashes, 24 August 2020, [url](#); Reportedly, 3 Security Personnel Killed In Taliban Attacks In Faryab, 29 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁰ Clark, K., Disbanding the ALP: A dangerous final chapter for a force with a chequered history, AAN, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Police officer among 8 killed in Faryab clashes, 18 November 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Marshal Dostum Takes The Lead in Faryab Battle, 18 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷² Reportedly, Taliban Suffered Heavy Casualties in Faryab; 10 Militants Killed, 7 Arrested, 18 January 2021, [url](#); Menafn, Afghanistan- Marshal Dostum Leads War in Faryab, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

2.9.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA ranked Faryab province third (on par with Nangarhar) in terms of civilians most affected by the conflict, documenting 576 civilian casualties (146 deaths and 430 injured) in the province. This represents a decrease of 13 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted killings and airstrikes.¹⁶⁷³ Resolute Support recorded between 102 and 150 civilian casualties in Faryab in the first half of 2020, reporting similar numbers of civilian casualties between the first and second quarter of 2020.¹⁶⁷⁴ RS data on civilian casualties per province for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.¹⁶⁷⁵

According to a representative of an international NGO met by the Swedish Migration Agency, in Kabul in January 2020, Faryab remained a very insecure province where the security situation had further deteriorated.¹⁶⁷⁶ In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, sources consulted by ACLED reported 366 violent events in Faryab province, of which 259 were coded as 'battles', 78 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 29 as 'violence against civilians'.¹⁶⁷⁷ Qaysar district accounted for more than one quarter (98) of all incidents in the province, followed by Almar with 45 incidents and Khwajasabzposh, Dawlatabad and Shirintagab, each with over 30 incidents.¹⁶⁷⁸ With the exception of Almar district, these districts scored over 3.0 in conflict intensity¹⁶⁷⁹ on a scale from 1.0 (lowest) to 4.0 (highest) in UNOCHA's hard-to-reach districts list as of December 2020.¹⁶⁸⁰

¹⁶⁷³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

¹⁶⁷⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹⁶⁷⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁶ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 45

¹⁶⁷⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Faryab province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Faryab province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁹ Indicators used for analysing the conflict intensity were: number of kinetic conflict events (25 %), number of casualties (40 %: conflict actors – 25 %, civilian casualties – 75 %), number of airstrikes/IDF incidents (10 %), number of IED/UXO incidents (detonations and discoveries) (10 %) and active/disputed control (15 %)

¹⁶⁸⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Hard-To-Reach Districts, 11 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 4-6

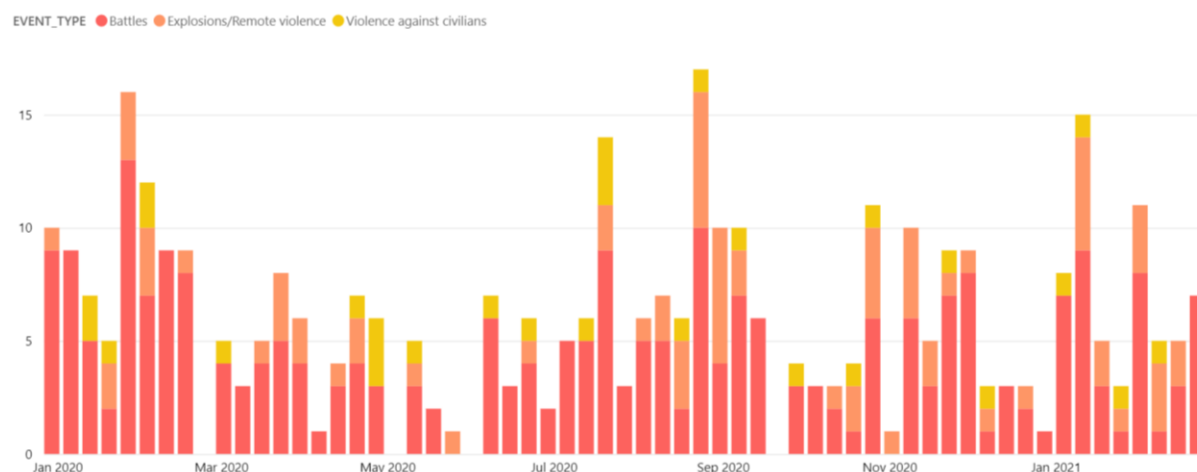


Figure 18: Faryab province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁶⁸¹

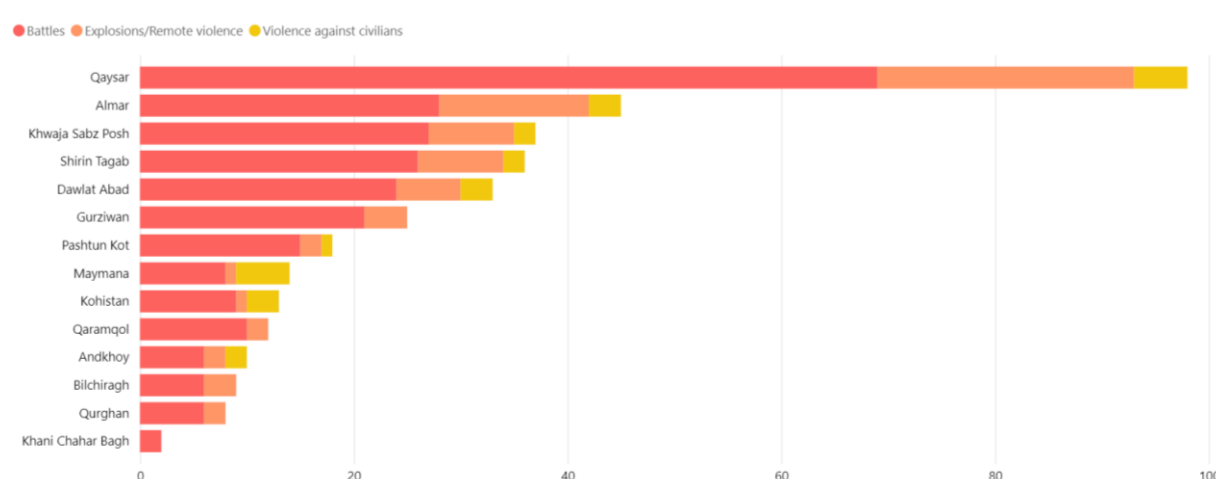


Figure 19: Faryab province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁶⁸²

Of the battles recorded by ACLED, the majority concerned ‘armed clashes’.¹⁶⁸³ The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or so-called Arbaki and local uprising forces¹⁶⁸⁴ or clashes between (pro-)government forces and the Taliban.¹⁶⁸⁵ Attacks on military or police

¹⁶⁸¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Faryab province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Faryab province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 6 events (2 battles, 1 remote violence and 3 violence against incidents) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

¹⁶⁸³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Faryab province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁴ For more information on Arbaki and uprising forces, see section 1.2.1. of this report.

¹⁶⁸⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

facilities such as checkpoints¹⁶⁸⁶, police headquarters¹⁶⁸⁷ and military bases¹⁶⁸⁸ as well as attacks on government officials¹⁶⁸⁹ or governmental buildings.¹⁶⁹⁰ Some of those armed clashes resulted in civilian casualties.¹⁶⁹¹ In 2020 UNAMA documented 376 civilian casualties from ground engagements in Faryab (65 % of all civilian casualties in the province),¹⁶⁹² ranking the province first in terms of civilian casualties from this type of incidents in Afghanistan.¹⁶⁹³ Civilians were killed and wounded during and following Taliban attacks on security outposts in Kohestan district and Maymana city in September 2020¹⁶⁹⁴ and in Shirintagab district in January 2021.¹⁶⁹⁵ One civilian was killed and six others were injured when the Taliban shot a pro-government militia member in the bazaar of Dawlatabad district in January 2021.¹⁶⁹⁶

Several operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under 'armed clashes'. Most were carried out in January and August 2020¹⁶⁹⁷ and some of these operations were backed by air strikes.¹⁶⁹⁸

In late December 2020 a clash occurred between police and local uprising forces in Qaysar district during which one police officer was killed and an uprising force member was injured.¹⁶⁹⁹

During the reporting period there were reports of AGEs attacking Almar district centre in July 2020,¹⁷⁰⁰ attacking Shiringtagab district and capturing Kohestan district also in July 2020,¹⁷⁰¹ attacking the centre of Gurziwan district in October 2020¹⁷⁰² and January 2020¹⁷⁰³ and the centre of Qaysar¹⁷⁰⁴ and Shirintagab¹⁷⁰⁵ districts in February 2021. Government forces claimed to have recaptured Khwajasabzposh in late August 2020, having retaken control of Ghazari village, a crucial and strategic area in the district, after almost two and a half years.¹⁷⁰⁶ A Provincial Council member told Kabul based news service Reportedly in October 2020 that the Taliban carried out heavy attacks on several districts in Faryab, putting Qaysar district on the verge of collapse, forcing the relocation of Kohestan's district office to another village and prompting all officials to leave Maymana city, as the villages nearby were under Taliban control.¹⁷⁰⁷ Military sources claimed in early January 2021 to have cleared Andkhoy, Khwajasabzposh, Qaysar and Almar districts from the Taliban as a result of an

¹⁶⁸⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update 27 July – 2 August 2020, 7 August 2020, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update 14 – 20 September 2020, 23 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁹² Calculation based on UNAMA data.

¹⁶⁹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72; 110

¹⁶⁹⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Faryab province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁸ Reportedly, Air Force Supports Security Forces In Clashes With Taliban In Faryab, 29 July 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban attacks repulsed in Faryab, at least 11 militants killed, wounded: Shaheen Corps, 5 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁹ Khaama Press, Police killed in A Clash with Public Uprising Forces, Faryab Province, 27 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 – 19 July 2020), 22 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁰¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁵ Reportedly, Four Afghan Security Forces Killed, Wounded in Taliban's Attack in Faryab, 22 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁶ Reportedly, Heavy Taliban Casualties In Faryab With Khwaja Sabz Posh Cleared, 31 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁷ Reportedly, Provincial Officials Talk About Rising Insecurity In Faryab, 11 October 2020, [url](#)

operation named Shahin 119.¹⁷⁰⁸ During the drafting of this report in March 2021 heavy fighting over control of Almar was reported with local officials and journalists reporting that the Taliban took control over the district after the acting district police chief surrendered to the movement,¹⁷⁰⁹ while MoD denied having lost the district.¹⁷¹⁰

Incidents of 'shelling/artillery/missile' attack made up 9 % of all reported violent incidents in Faryab between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021, nearly two out of three occurring in Qaysar and Almar districts. Those incidents were attributed to both the Taliban or unidentified armed groups and Afghan military forces and at times caused civilian casualties.¹⁷¹¹ For example in Shirintagab district in October 2020, when mortars fired by the Taliban landed on a market and killed four civilians and injured more than ten others.¹⁷¹² Two children were killed and two others and one woman were injured when an Afghan army mortar hit a house in Almar district in January 2021.¹⁷¹³ Another mortar hitting a house in Shirintagab district in February 2021 killed one woman and injured four children.¹⁷¹⁴

Twenty six 'air/drone' strikes recorded by ACLED in Faryab between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021 represented 7 % of all violent events in the province.¹⁷¹⁵ All air strikes were carried out by Afghan forces, more than one out of three in Qaysar district. While air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs and destroyed their facilities and equipment,¹⁷¹⁶ some also caused civilian casualties, for example when the Afghan Air Force bombed houses where the Taliban had gathered to carry out an attack, to hold a meeting or to take shelter in Qaysar and Khwajasabzposh districts in August 2020.¹⁷¹⁷ The airstrikes in Khwajasabzposh were intended to reopen the highway between Maymana and Jowzjan province, according to the Afghan military forces.¹⁷¹⁸

AGEs also used roadside bombs or IEDs, including pressure-plate IEDs, to target security forces,¹⁷¹⁹ at times also causing casualties among civilians.¹⁷²⁰ This happened for example on 8 June 2020 when seven children in Garziwan district were injured when their donkey stepped on a pressure-plate IED.¹⁷²¹ Civilians were killed in two roadside bomb blasts in Qaysar district in October 2020.¹⁷²²

¹⁷⁰⁸ Reportedly, More Than 500 Taliban Militants Killed, Wounded in Faryab: Shahin Corps, 2 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁹ ISWnews, Taliban captured Almar, 11 March 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, Taliban Capture Center of Almar District in Faryab, 11 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁰ Khaama Press, MoD rejects the fall of Almar district to Taliban: Faryab, 11 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Faryab province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Mortar Attack Claims 4, Hurts 10 in Faryab, 22 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Faryab province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#). These do not include air strikes are shellings carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under 'battles'. For more information on ACLED's methodology, please consult the introduction.

¹⁷¹⁶ Khaama Press, Faryab Airstrike Wrecks Taliban Camp, 31 August 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 45 Taliban killed, 75 injured in Faryab airstrikes, 4 September 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, 8 Taliban Killed, 300 Rocket Shells Discovered: MoD, 13 January 2021, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 ANA soldiers, 6 Taliban killed in Faryab, 24 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, '22 Taliban Killed in Faryab Clashes': MoD, 7 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 of a family killed, 6 wounded in Faryab blitz, 19 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Faryab province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 – 19 July 2020), 23 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷²¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020 (revised on 10 August 2020, [url](#), pp. 9-10

¹⁷²² Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab violence leaves 22 dead & wounded, 27 October 2020, [url](#)

Twenty-nine incidents of ‘violence against civilians’ were recorded by ACLED, attributed to both the Taliban or unidentified armed groups and Afghan security forces and representing 8 % of all violent events in Faryab province between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021.¹⁷²³ These incidents included the killing of the head of an appeal court¹⁷²⁴, the killing of a tribal elder¹⁷²⁵, the killing of an off-duty soldier¹⁷²⁶, the abduction and killing of three civilians, including a former garrison commander¹⁷²⁷, the killing of a family in Andkhoy district,¹⁷²⁸ the public hanging of two men having shaved their beards by the Taliban in Maymana¹⁷²⁹, the killing of religious scholars,¹⁷³⁰ the killing of civilians in a mosque in Maymana in July 2020,¹⁷³¹ the abduction of a local reporter in July 2020,¹⁷³² the killing of a young tailor in a market in Qaysar district when he refused to close his shop on the Taliban’s request in October 2020,¹⁷³³ the killing of a women by the Taliban in Pashtun Kot district in September 2020,¹⁷³⁴ the shooting of a journalist in Maymana in February 2021¹⁷³⁵ the killing of civilians which the Taliban’s website Voice of Jihad attributed to ‘enemy’ forces,¹⁷³⁶ and the killing by Afghan forces of a truck driver and his passenger in Dawlatabad district in January 2021, who had ignored a truck ban on Faryab’s provincial roads imposed to prevent Taliban car bomb attacks.¹⁷³⁷ In addition to the incidents recorded by ACLED, UNAMA documented the abduction of eleven civilians, including religious scholars and elders, by the Taliban on 17 May 2020 in Shirintagab district after their partaking in protests against the local Taliban.¹⁷³⁸ Several of the incidents of violence against civilians occurred in Maymana, where they accounted for over one third of all violent events in the district recorded by ACLED.¹⁷³⁹

Without further specifying which provinces or districts were impacted, UNOCHA observed how civilian movements along main roads and roads between provincial capital and district centres were interrupted and humanitarian activities were obstructed in the northern region of Afghanistan due to clashes and illegal checkpoints in September 2020¹⁷⁴⁰ as well as in January and February 2021.¹⁷⁴¹ The New York Times reported in February 2021 that the highways in the north, which are vital as

¹⁷²³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Faryab province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁴ Afghan Islamic Press (@aip_news), [Twitter], posted on: 16 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Family Of Well-Known Writer Among Seven Killed In Afghan Violence, 20 June 2020, [url](#); MIE, Tribal Elder Shot Dead by Taliban in Faryab, 20 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture, kill off-duty soldier in Faryab, 7 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 of a family shot dead in Faryab; Taliban deny involvement, 19 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁹ Afghanistan Times, Taliban hang two men for shaving beards in Faryab, 27 June 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020 (revised on 10 August 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁷³⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York

Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³² RiV-Monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 21 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁴ RiV-Monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 30 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁵ IFJ, Afghanistan: Journalist survives assassination attempt, 16 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁶ Voice of Jihad, Enemy firing martyr child in Faryab, 8 February 2020, [url](#); Voice of Jihad, Enemy martyrs villager, abducts 3 others in Faryab, 23 January 2020, [url](#); Voice of Jihad, War Crimes (August 2020, 5 September 2020, [url](#); Voice of Jihad, Enemy firing hurts child in Qisar, 11 September 2020, [url](#); Voice of Jihad, Enemy firing hurts child in Almar, 17 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 58

¹⁷³⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Faryab province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 – 20 September 2020), 23 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁴¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 – 10 January 2021), 13 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (11 – 17 January 2021), 19 January 2021, 19 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 – 24 January 2021), 27 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

they offer the limited options of traveling between provinces by road, 'have increasingly become the front line for an emboldened Taliban insurgency'.¹⁷⁴² In early December 2020 the Taliban reportedly blew up a bridge in Khwajasabzposh district, impacting thousands of families from villages connected by that bridge.¹⁷⁴³

Explosives used in a Taliban attack on the police headquarters in Almar district in November 2020 were so powerful that nearby shops were damaged as well.¹⁷⁴⁴ Another explosion in Qaysar district bazaar, also in November 2020 and reportedly also intended to hit the police headquarters, destroyed dozens of shops.¹⁷⁴⁵ Dozens of shops and homes were destroyed in an explosion at the market in Dawlatabad district in late December 2020.¹⁷⁴⁶

The WHO did not register any attacks related to health care provision in Faryab province in 2020.¹⁷⁴⁷ However Faryab was one out of six provinces where UNAMA documented the abduction of healthcare workers between 11 March and 23 May 2020.¹⁷⁴⁸ Also, in July 2020, the WHO expressed concern about the potential disruption on timely assessment and response in some of the northern provinces, including Faryab, due to the security threat on the Mazar-Shiberghan-Faryab highway.¹⁷⁴⁹

An AIHCR report quoted by Gandhara in September 2020 indicated that almost half of the school-age girls in Faryab provinces were deprived of a proper education, the conflict being the main reason girls were not attending school.¹⁷⁵⁰ A girls school caught fire during reported clashes in Khwajazabzposh district in August 2020.¹⁷⁵¹ As a result of fighting between Afghan forces and AGEs in February 2021 the Jan Bibi Uoz Bashi Girls' High School in Qaysar district was heavily damaged, depriving 3 000 girl students of education.¹⁷⁵² Faryab was one out of four the provinces where small community-based classes, often taking place in people's homes, were operational, following a December 2020 arrangement between UNICEF and the Taliban to expand Community Based Education to hard-to-reach areas and conflict zones. While such classes are not schools, they do make use of the national curriculum.¹⁷⁵³

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 39 066 persons displaced from Faryab (mainly from Khwajasabzposh and Qaysar¹⁷⁵⁴ districts), of which 27 545 (71 %) were displaced within the province, while a few thousand were displaced to Balkh provincial capital Mazar-e Sharif and Jowzjan provincial capital Shiberghan. During the same period, 27 804 persons were displaced to Faryab, the large majority looking for refuge in Maymana district¹⁷⁵⁵ and a few

¹⁷⁴² New York Times (The), Inside the Shadowy Militias Luring Unsuspecting Afghans to Fight, or Die, 4 February 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#).

¹⁷⁴³ Arezo News, Taliban blow up bridge in northern province, 2 December 2020, [url](#); TKG, Taliban Destroy Bridge in Northern Afghanistan, 1 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 security personnel killed in Faryab bombing, 10 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁵ Khaama Press, Faryab Vehicle Blast Causes Material Damage, 17 November 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Three Wounded in Faryab Car Bomb Explosion: Official, 17 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁶ Reporterly, Car Bomb Explosion Caused Massive Damages in Faryab, 22 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁷ WHO, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (January 01 - December 31, 2020, 11 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁸ UNAMA, Special Report: Attacks On Healthcare During The Covid-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 9, 20

¹⁷⁴⁹ WHO, Situation Report. Afghanistan. Emergency Type: protracted emergency, July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁰ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Contested Afghan Provinces See Drastic Drop In Girls' Education, 30 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵¹ Hesam, H. (@hhesam_), [Twitter], posted on: 14 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵² NRC, Afghanistan girls' high school severely damaged in airstrike and fighting, 10 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 39

¹⁷⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (31 August - 6 September 2020, 9 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁵⁵ Tolonews, Faryab Residents Fear Clashes Will Intensify as Spring Nears, 26 February 2021, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Displaced by war, dozens of Faryab people contracted Covid-19, 22 January 2021, [url](#)

hundred in Andkhoy or Qaysar districts. Maymana also hosted a few dozen IDPs from Kunduz, Badghis, Ghor, Sar-e Pul and Balkh provinces.¹⁷⁵⁶

Out of all IDPs from Khwajasabzposh, 43 % were displaced in October 2020,¹⁷⁵⁷ as a result of military operations and clashes.¹⁷⁵⁸

Seven IDPs were registered from Maymana district in October 2020 and another seven in November 2020. All were displaced within the district.¹⁷⁵⁹

UNOCHA and local media reported how continued clashes between AGEs and the ANDSF in Faryab caused continued displacement in 2020 and early 2021.¹⁷⁶⁰ According to the Governor of the province, 10,000 families have been displaced from Khwaja Sabzposh, Almar and Qaisar districts to Faryab's capital Maymana due to war since the last few months.¹⁷⁶¹

¹⁷⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (26 October – 1 November 2020), 4 November 2020 [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁵⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

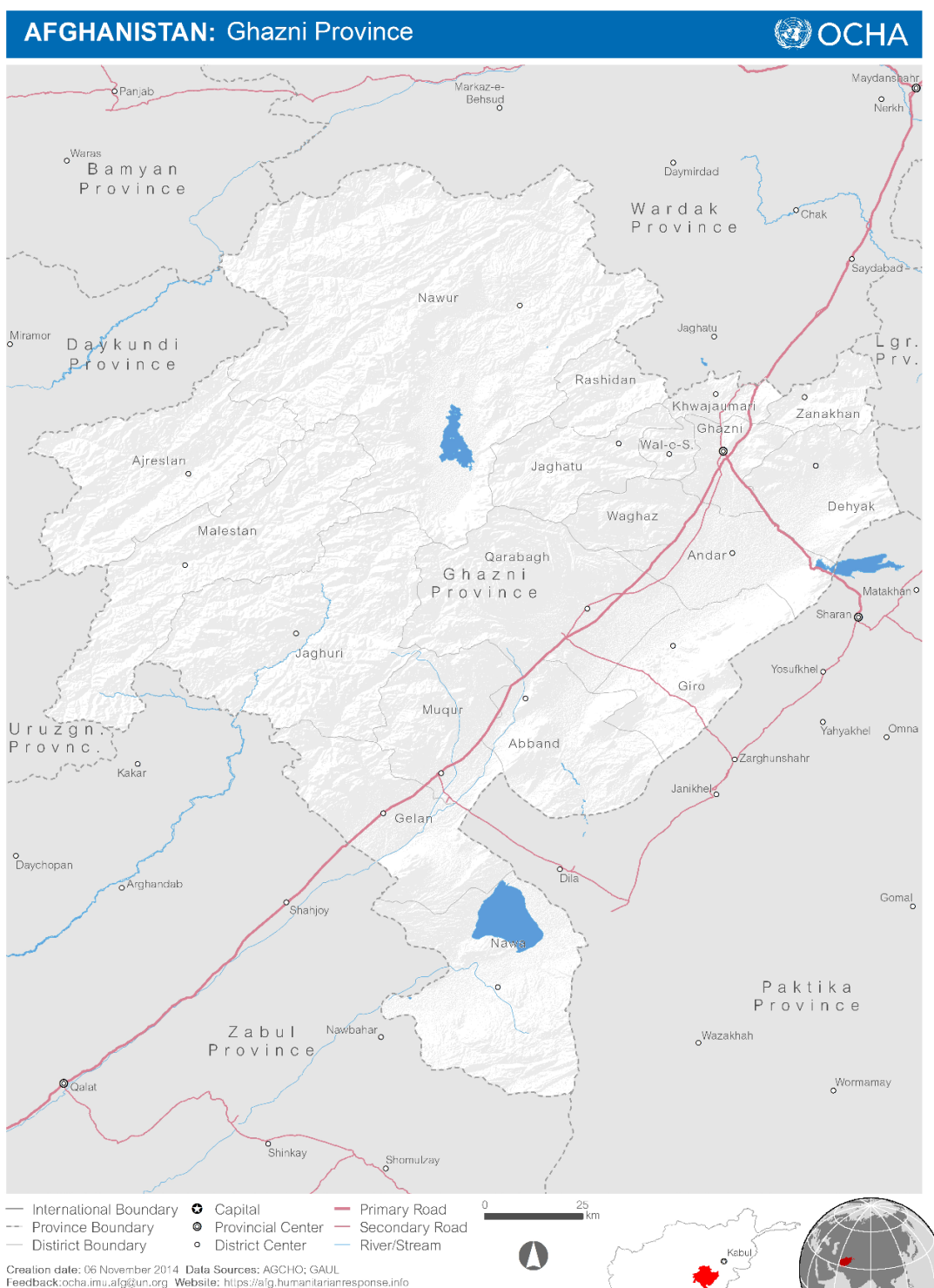
¹⁷⁶⁰ Tolonews, Faryab Residents Fear Clashes Will Intensify as Spring Nears, 26 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 January – 26 January 2020), 29 January 2020, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (3 February – 9 February 2020), 12 February 2020, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (24 – 30 August 2020), 2 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 – 13 December 2020), 16 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁶¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Displaced by war, dozens of Faryab people contracted Covid-19, 22 January 2021, [url](#)



2.10 Ghazni

2.10.1 General description of the province



Map 10: Afghanistan – Ghazni province, source: UNOCHA¹⁷⁶²

¹⁷⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 9

The province of Ghazni is located in the south-east of Afghanistan. The province is divided into the following administrative units: Ghazni, with the provincial capital of Ghazni City, Abband, Ajrestan, Andar (Shelgar¹⁷⁶³), Dehyak, Gelan, Giro, Jaghatu, Jaghuri, Khwajaumari, Malestan, Muqur, Nawa, Nawur, Qarabagh, Rashidan, Waghaz, Walimuhammad-e Shahid (Khugyani), and Zanakhan.¹⁷⁶⁴

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, Ghazni province has a population of 1 338 597, with 183 051 of its residents living in the provincial capital of Ghazni City.¹⁷⁶⁵

Ghazni is inhabited by Pashtuns (49 %), Hazaras (46 %), Tajiks (5 %), and other smaller minorities. Three districts – Jaghuri, Malestan and Nawur – are inhabited exclusively by Hazara population. Kuchi nomads also inhabit Ghazni, and their presence in the province may differ throughout the year due to migration.¹⁷⁶⁶ The Tajik minority, although not numerous, live mainly in Ghazni city, constituting at least 20% population of the city.¹⁷⁶⁷

A US military expert referred to Ghazni city as a 'key intersection', since it is situated on the Ring Road (or Highway One), connecting the capital Kabul with the major population centre of Kandahar in the south. Additionally, the road to Paktika's capital Sharan branches off the Ring Road in Ghazni City, while the road to Paktya's capital Gardez forks a bit north of Ghazni City.¹⁷⁶⁸ Some isolated, remote districts (Nawur, Jaghuri, Malestan inhabited by Hazara and Ajrestan by Pashtun) suffer more restricted access in the winter season than the others as roads are often closed by winter snow and by spring mud.¹⁷⁶⁹

There is an airport near Ghazni city and Ghazni-Kandahar highway.¹⁷⁷⁰ It serves both military and civilian purposes.¹⁷⁷¹

2.10.2 Conflict background and actors in Ghazni

Taliban reappeared in Ghazni around 2003 in Andar district.¹⁷⁷² The Taliban in Ghazni operated first in the rural areas outside the provincial capital and attacked government officials, infrastructure and schools.¹⁷⁷³ The main driver of the conflict in the province was the desire to take control of the main road connecting Kabul and Kandahar, passing through Ghazni province. There were constant IEDs explosions, trucks set on fire and military blockades as Taliban tried to stop the military supplies to the foreign forces and their military bases on the south.¹⁷⁷⁴ As more attacks took place in Andar and elsewhere in Ghazni province, the reaction of the government armed forces become increasingly more violent and indiscriminate. Taliban attacks have intensified further from 2005.¹⁷⁷⁵ In 2012, in

¹⁷⁶³ Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., Uprising, ALP and Taleban in Andar: The arc of government failure, AAN, 22 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁴ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 20

¹⁷⁶⁵ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-20, 18 November 2019, [url](#) p. 16

¹⁷⁶⁶ JUH and AADA, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Ghazni Province, Humanitarian Response, December 2019, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁷⁶⁷ JUH and AADA, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Ghazni Province, Humanitarian Response, 01 Dec 2019 to 30 Dec 2019, December 2019, [url](#), p. 9; Kohistani, Ghazni Province, 2016, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁸ Clearance Jobs, Taliban Seizure of Ghazni City Returns Terror Organization to its Roots, 13 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁹ JUH and AADA, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Ghazni Province, Humanitarian Response, 01 Dec 2019 to 30 Dec 2019, December 2019, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁷⁷⁰ Airports Worldwide, Ghazni Airport w: [url](#)

¹⁷⁷¹ CAPA, Centre for Aviation, Ghazni airport n/d, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷² Giustozzi, A. (ed), Decoding the New Taliban: insights from the Afghan field, Hurst & Co: London, 2009, pp 204-206

¹⁷⁷³ Osman B., The Road to Ghazni: Bombs, battles and blockades 13 July 2013, AAN, [url](#), Kohistani, Ghazni Province, 2016, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁴ Osman B., The Road to Ghazni: Bombs, battles and blockades 13 July 2013, AAN, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁵ Muzhary F. R., Finding Business Opportunity in Conflict: Shopkeepers, Taleban and the political economy of Andar district, 2 December 2015, [url](#)

Andar district, some heavy clashes broke out between Taliban and local Pashtun pro-government forces, known as the 'Andar uprising' against Taliban.¹⁷⁷⁶

After U.S. and NATO combat mission formally ended in December 2014, fighting intensified in the most important districts of the province in 2015.¹⁷⁷⁷ In 2018, the Taliban started another major offensive, attacking several district centres.¹⁷⁷⁸ In August 2018, they even managed to take over large parts of the provincial capital Ghazni city for several days¹⁷⁷⁹ and late in October 2018 they attacked Jaghuri and Malestan, two districts self-governed and inhabited entirely by Hazaras.¹⁷⁸⁰ The offensive caused displacement of more than 7 000 people (1 144 families) from the Hazara districts.¹⁷⁸¹ Before the end of 2018, both districts were cleared out from Taliban.¹⁷⁸²

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Ghazni province increased by 136 %.¹⁷⁸³

During 2019, ANA reportedly managed to recapture some administrative centres of Dehyak, Khwajaumari¹⁷⁸⁴, Jaghatu, Ajristan and Nawur¹⁷⁸⁵ as well as parts of highways located in the districts retaken. However, an Afghan military official, quoted by the Stars and Stripes magazine, acknowledged that 'the highways still had to be cleared of the Taliban's roadside bombs each morning'.¹⁷⁸⁶

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Ghazni province is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.¹⁷⁸⁷ The main military base in the province is called Camp Sultan. According to Afghan military officials cited by Stars and Stripes in 2020, ANA does not have enough troops to hold the territory of the province. The army established a number of small outposts around the province to make larger checkpoints easier to defend. They quickly became a frequent target of Taliban nightly attacks.¹⁷⁸⁸ Some of these bases were supplied by air without any land access. Other bases had road access but the Taliban still targeted the supply operations.¹⁷⁸⁹

In order to supplement the presence of the ANP, ALP, and the NDS paramilitary forces, a newly established ANA Territorial Force (ANA TF) has been piloted in the Hazara district of Jaghuri from November 2018¹⁷⁹⁰ and afterwards in four other districts of the province: Andar, Muqur, Dehyak and Qarabagh. According to ANA analysis, elders backed the initiative but there were problems with recruitment. Either there were not 'genuine community support' for it¹⁷⁹¹ or Taliban managed to

¹⁷⁷⁶ Habib E., AAN Reportage: Who fights whom in the Andar Uprising? AAN, 10 August 2012 [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁷ Kohistani, Ghazni Province, 2016, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁸ Qaane, E., The Insecure Spring of Ghazni: Results of third-grade treatment by the centre?, AAN, 25 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁹ Muzhary F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, 16 December 2018, 2018, [url](#);

Muzhary F. R., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁰ Muzhary F., AAN, Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before 30/12/2018 w: [url](#)

¹⁷⁸¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements 14 October 2018 - 1 January 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, 'From One Grave To Another': Afghan Hazara Fleeing Taliban Find Little Solace In Escape 15 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸² Muzhary F., AAN, Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before 30 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁷⁸⁴ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁷⁸⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt retakes control of Ghazni's Jaghatu district, 22 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁶ Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 9 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁷ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁷⁸⁸ Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 9 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁹ Muzhary F., One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province, AAN, 13 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁰ Muzhary F., AAN, Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before 30 December 2018, [url](#); Clark, K., The Afghan Territorial Force: Learning from the lessons of the past?, AAN, 15 January 2019, [url](#), pp. 26-27

¹⁷⁹¹ Clark, K. et al., Afghanistan's Newest Local Defence Force: Were "all the mistakes of the ALP" turned into ANA-TF safeguards?, AAN, August 2020, [url](#), pp. 4-5, 26

threaten the local population.¹⁷⁹² One company was finally recruited in Qarabagh district but soldiers were poorly trained and screened and in December 2019, they became a target of an insider attack in which 23 of them were killed.¹⁷⁹³

The Taliban had 'long-established significant influence' in the province.¹⁷⁹⁴ According to Afghan military sources quoted by the 'Stars and Stripes' article, during the night, the Taliban pass through the villages in the province, even if they are not under their control. They sometimes plant roadside bombs or plan attacks on the government checkpoints. However, the Taliban only use small arms fire and the army can call in for artillery or air support when needed. On average, the main military base launches 80 shells per week.¹⁷⁹⁵ AAN noted that Andar district is the key location for Taliban in Ghazni as it was a command centre for attacks on different parts of the province. Most Taliban fighters currently active in Andar are locals, with very few outsiders¹⁷⁹⁶ but they are recruited only on voluntarily basis.¹⁷⁹⁷ In a case study on Andar district, AAN noted that two parallel forms of government have operated for years, with a shadow Taliban administration in place. Since 2013, the Taliban have expanded their governance structure by collecting taxes, and by establishing several administrative commissions. While the government plays an important role in providing health and education services and it is also responsible for ID cards distribution, in other aspects of daily life its role is highly limited.¹⁷⁹⁸

UNAMA documented also ISKP activity in Ghazni province in 2019 which caused civilian casualties.¹⁷⁹⁹

In September 2019, the LWJ referred to Ghazni province as 'a haven for Al Qaeda'.¹⁸⁰⁰ According to Jamestown Foundation, some Al Qaeda cells were present in Ghazni province. However, Al Qaeda have lost many top leaders since 2017 in Ghazni.¹⁸⁰¹ In October 2020, NDS killed a 'senior Al Qaida leader', Abu Muhsin al-Masri, in a Taliban-controlled area of Ghazni.¹⁸⁰²

A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021 designed 34.74% of Ghazni territory and population under government control, 64.74% of territory and population under Taliban control and 0.53% territory controlled by neither side. According the survey from Pajhwok: the entire district and its centres under Taliban control is: Gero, Arjistan and Nawa.¹⁸⁰³ According to the LWJ, most areas in Ghazni province are under 'Taliban control': Ajrestan, Nawur, Andar, Giro, Rashidan, Jaghatu, Walimuhammad-e Shahid, Waghaz, Nawa, Dehyak, Zanakhan. The rest of districts are considered as 'contested': Ghazni capital district, Khwajaumari, Abbando, Muqur, Qarabagh, Jaghuri, Malestan and Gelan. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Jaghatu shifted to 'contested' and Jaghuri as 'GoA control or undermined'.¹⁸⁰⁴

In May 2021, Bilal Sarwary posted on twitter a number of footages showing Taliban's tunnels in Ghazni notably in one of its villages named Arzu (a strategic area located outside Ghazni city), where

¹⁷⁹² Muzhary F., AAN, Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹³ Clark, K. et al., Afghanistan's Newest Local Defence Force: Were "all the mistakes of the ALP" turned into ANA-TF safeguards?, AAN, August 2020, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁷⁹⁴ Qaane E., The Insecure Spring of Ghazni: Results of third-grade treatment by the centre?, 25 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁵ Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁶ Muzhary F., One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province, AAN, 13 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁷ Afghan S., Living with the Taleban (1): Local experiences in Andar district, Ghazni province, AAN, 19 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁸ Muzhary F., One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province, AAN, 13 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 36

¹⁸⁰⁰ LWJ, Taliban supplies al Qaeda with explosives for attacks in major Afghan cities, 16 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰¹ Jamestown Foundation, Al-Qaeda's South Asian Branch Gravitating Toward Kashmir, 17 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰² VOA, Afghan Government Says Taliban Maintaining Ties With Al-Qaida, 6 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁴ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

the group has dug tunnels to connect residential houses and placed explosives in houses as ‘trapes’.¹⁸⁰⁵ During the same period, another footage showed ANDSF personnel surrendering to the Taliban in Arzu village¹⁸⁰⁶ after their base fell into the hands of Taliban in the mentioned village.¹⁸⁰⁷

2.10.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 418 civilian casualties (183 deaths and 235 injured) in Ghazni. This represents a decrease of 38 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, non-suicide IEDs and targeted killings.¹⁸⁰⁸

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 19 February 2021, ACLED reported a total of 455 incidents related to security in Ghazni province: 312 battles, 114 remote violence, 28 cases of violence against civilians and one concerning a riot against the alleged rape of two women by bodyguards of the police chief.¹⁸⁰⁹

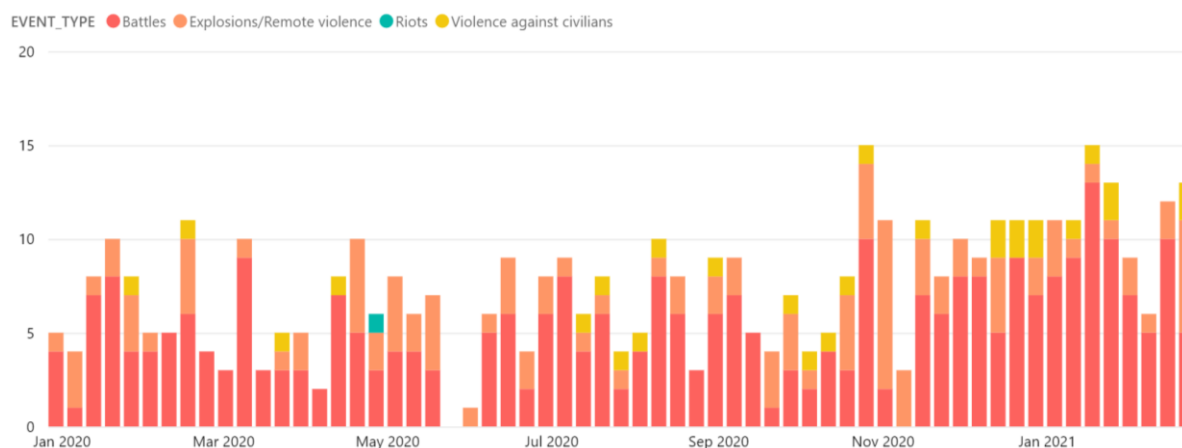


Figure 20: Ghazni province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2020, based on ACLED data¹⁸¹⁰

¹⁸⁰⁵ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 2 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁶ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 2 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁷ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 1 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

¹⁸⁰⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghazni province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghazni province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

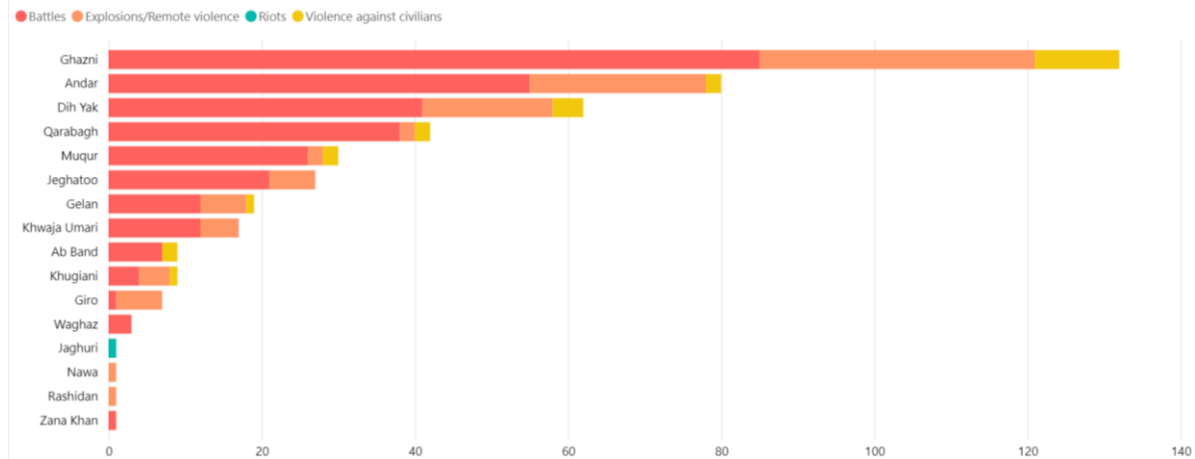


Figure 21: Ghazni province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2020, based on ACLED data¹⁸¹¹

In 2020, governmental forces tried to recapture or at least protect some villages in strategic districts of Ghazni, Andar and to clear parts of the route to Paktika and Paktya provinces.¹⁸¹² Heavy fighting took place in the districts surrounding provincial capital Ghazni and along main roads in Qarabagh, Muqur and Dehyak.¹⁸¹³

Some deadly attacks took place in Andar district: on 8 May 2020 US military airstrike destroyed residential area, injuring 11 civilians, on 1 July 2020 several civilians were killed and wounded during airstrike conducted by Afghan army which hit the local mosque¹⁸¹⁴, on 17 August 2020 five civilians, including two children, were killed in a rocket attack.¹⁸¹⁵

On 23 August 2020, roadside bomb exploded in Jaghatu district, killing seven civilians.¹⁸¹⁶ On 16 October 2020 five civilians were killed by Afghan and NATO forces in Shalgar district.¹⁸¹⁷ On 24 October 2020 a roadside bomb exploded killing nine passengers of a bus coming from Kabul to Ghazni. Authorities blamed Taliban but they did not confirm this attack.¹⁸¹⁸ On 18 December 2020, in the Gelan district, an explosion near a rickshaw of a salesman killed one man and 11 children from 5 to 16 years old and injured the salesman himself and another 11 children. The government maintained that the salesman worked for Taliban and carried the explosives for them but according Taliban and local people it was an accidental explosion of a mine found by children.¹⁸¹⁹

ACLED reported eleven cases of targeted killings or attacks in Ghazni city in the second part of 2020 and in January 2021. The perpetrators were usually unidentified gunmen or Taliban fighters who targeted wide range of people who might be perceived as working for government. Examples of

¹⁸¹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghazni province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 14 events (6 battles, 5 remote violence and 3 violence against civilians) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

¹⁸¹² Khamaa Press, Over 100 Taliban militants during a 16-day operation in Ghazni province, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸¹³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghazni province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁴ Liveumap, Afghanistan, accessed 1 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 24-30, 2020, 30 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁷ Voice of Jihad, 5 civilians martyred, 5 injured in enemy aggression, 16 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁸ Al Jazeera, Nine civilians killed in bomb attack on bus in Afghanistan, 24 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 33

victims include: tribal elders, a deputy chief of Ghazni jail, a journalist, government officials, two Red Crescent workers, a retired army general.¹⁸²⁰

In Jaghatu district in May 2020, Taliban allegedly killed and torched five men (three civilians from Malestan and two policemen from Rashidan district) while they were travelling to provincial capital, Ghazni.¹⁸²¹

According to Taliban sources, Afghan army and pro-government militias also arbitrary killed civilians in the province. For example on 26 March 2020 three persons were killed by ANA during two attacks in Ghazni district.¹⁸²² 15 April 2020 Afghan security forces killed an imam in Ab Band district.¹⁸²³ On 28 September 2020 two civilians were shot dead also in Ab Band.¹⁸²⁴ In Muqur district on 15 June 2020 four men and two children were beaten when they refused to help in construction work for the group.¹⁸²⁵

During 2020 in Ghazni, there were cases of destruction of property: a mosque in Dehyak district by airstrikes conducted by Afghan and US forces¹⁸²⁶ and in July 2020, unknown gunmen destroyed a high school in Andar.¹⁸²⁷

Taliban established lots of checkpoints to extort money along roads.¹⁸²⁸ Moreover, since December 2020 Taliban has increasingly abducted travellers from Jaghuri and Malestan passing through Qarabagh district on the way to Ghazni City. In December 2020 alone they kidnapped over 50 people allegedly for ransom.¹⁸²⁹

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 3 201 persons displaced from Ghazni province, of which 2 671 were displaced within the province. No displacement was registered from other provinces to Ghazni.¹⁸³⁰

The most displaced people (1 383 persons) came from Qarabagh district. They left their homes in May and in August 2020. They settled in Ghazni district. In August 2020 some displacement also within Ghazni district was registered. There were a total of 420 persons from Andar displaced to Kabul in two incidents during March and in July 2020; there were 75 persons from Malestan who relocated to the Injil, Herat province.¹⁸³¹

¹⁸²⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghazni province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸²¹ Afghanistan Times, Taliban burn five people in Ghazni, 18 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸²² Voice of Jihad, 3 civilians martyred in Ghazni, 28 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸²³ Voice of Jihad, 5 civilians martyred, 3 more wounded in enemy aggression, 17 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁴ Voice of Jihad, 2 civilians martyred, 1 injured in Ghazni 29 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 70

¹⁸²⁶ Voice of Jihad, Masjid bombed out in Ghazni; 4 civilians martyred, 4 injured, 21 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghazni province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁸ Salaam Times, Truck drivers call Taliban 'looters' as group continues extortion on highways, 24 January 2020, [url](#); Kabul Now, Taliban force people to pay extortion money, Ghazni councilman confirms, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

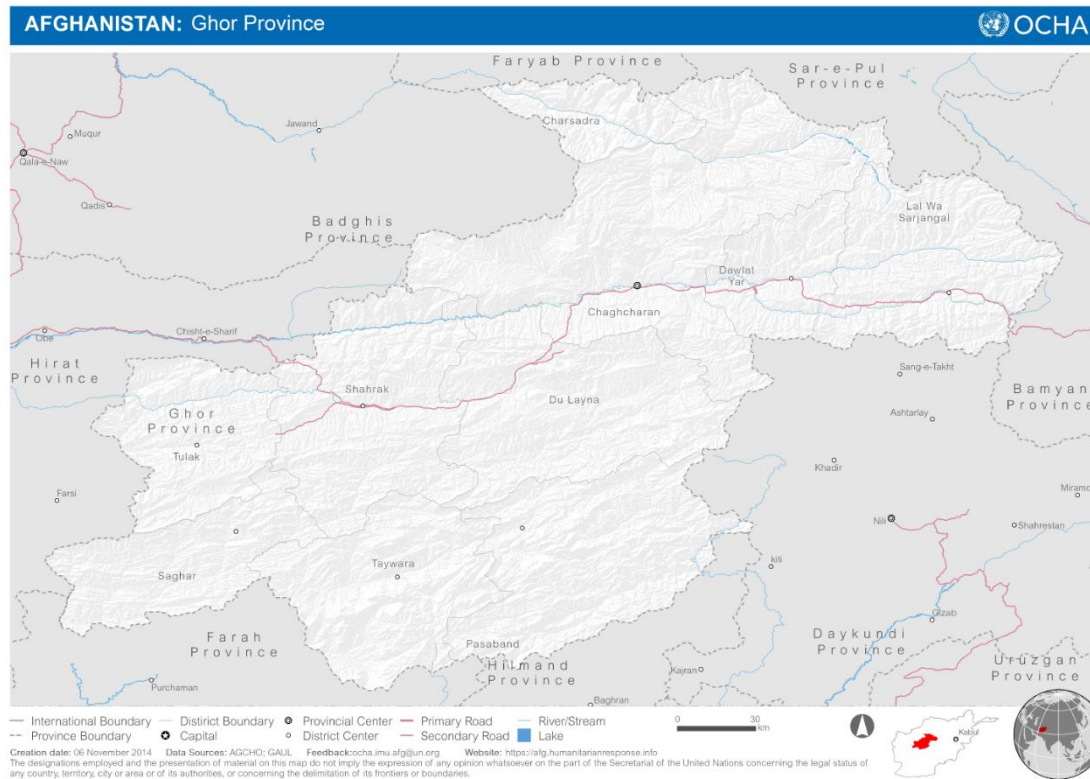
¹⁸²⁹ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, Taliban: the Monster of Terror and Kidnap in Highways of Central Areas, 17 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸³¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

2.11 Ghor

2.11.1 General description of the province



Map 11: Afghanistan – Ghor province, source: UNOCHA¹⁸³²

The province of Ghor is located in central towards north-western Afghanistan and does not share an international border. It is surrounded by the provinces of Herat and Badghis to the west, Faryab and Sar-e Pul to the north, Bamiyan and Daykundi to the east, and Helmand and Farah to the south. Ghor province is divided into the following administrative units: Chaghcharan (Firozkoh), Charsadra, Dawlatyar, Du Layna, Lal Wa Sarjangan, Pasaband, Saghar, Shahrak, Taywara, Tulak and Murghab. The provincial capital is Chaghcharan.¹⁸³³ Murghab, which was part of Firozkoh, was established as a new district of Ghor province by the Presidential Decree number 101 on 12 Jaddi 1398 (2 January 2020) with Shorabak as its centre.¹⁸³⁴

Afghanistan, NSIA estimated the population of Ghor at 751 254 in 2019-20.¹⁸³⁵

According to the provincial profile published by the US Naval Postgraduate School, the largest ethnic group in Ghor are Tajiks, followed by Hazaras, Aimaqs and a small number of Pashtuns and

¹⁸³² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Ghor Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁸³³ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Ghor, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, n.d., [url](#), p. 33; Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019, Ghor administrative units, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸³⁴ ACKU, « د افغانستان اسلامي جمهوریت، د عدلیې وزارت، رسمي جریده، فرمان رئیس ج.ا.ا در مورد ایجاد واحد اداری ولسوالی مرغاب به مرکزیت ، شورابه در چوکات ولایت غور [informal translation: 'Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Justice, official Gazette, Presidential decree of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the creation of administrative unit of Murghab district with Shorabak as its centre as part of Ghor province], 2 January 2020, [url](#); Afghan Bios, Murghab district, Ghor province, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁵ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2019-20, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 29

Uzbeks¹⁸³⁶; RFE/RL stated that Aimaqs constitute the majority of Ghor.¹⁸³⁷ The Aimaqs are ‘closely related to the Hazara, and to some degree the Tajiks’ according to the US Naval Postgraduate School.¹⁸³⁸

Ghor is located 480 km from Kabul. It is mountainous, and among the most undeveloped provinces. The roads are frequently blocked to traffic during several months of winter due to heavy snowfall.¹⁸³⁹ In November 2020, the rehabilitation of 35 km long Herat-Ghor highway (also known as Herat-Chesht highway) has begun and 35 % of it has been completed.¹⁸⁴⁰ As of November 2020, drivers have reported on the presence of ‘Taliban, robberies and illegal armed men’ on the highway between Herat and Ghor.¹⁸⁴¹ In January 2021, an important part of the Herat-Ghor highway, in Shahrak district, was reportedly destroyed by the Taliban.¹⁸⁴² According to Afghan Civil Aviation Authority report of November 2020, there is an airport in Ghor (spelled as Chakhcharan), which is located one mile North-East Chaghcharan City.¹⁸⁴³ According to Kam Air flight schedule plan, there are three flights per week between Ghor and Kabul.¹⁸⁴⁴

2.11.2 Conflict background and actors in Ghor

According to AAN, ‘Ghor is known for its particularly confusing pattern of conflicts, involving insurgent groups and “freelancing” militias, the dividing line between which is all but hermetic [...]’.¹⁸⁴⁵ Besides Taliban insurgents, armed groups partially affiliated to political parties in the central government are present in the province. According to AAN, the ‘insurgent’ activities of some groups can be hardly distinguished from crime and allegiances have been shifting several times in the past.¹⁸⁴⁶ During the period of 2017, 2018 and 2020, the absence of rule of law and government was allegedly a particular pressing problem in Ghor.¹⁸⁴⁷

AAN reported in November 2016 of a network of militants active in the district of Chaghcharan, which maintained close links to the political party and former militia, Jamiat-e Islami, but also with established links to the Taliban after 2010. It was said to sympathise with ISKP after 2015 – even though AAN stated that claims of an IS-affiliation of the group proved wrong. While the network’s criminal activities led to protests and resistance of local residents, the government forces’ weak presence in Ghor, as well as the network’s affiliation with Jamiat reportedly prevented its disarmament. On the contrary, after fighting between the group and the Taliban erupted, provincial officials treated the group as a ‘popular uprising’ force and the ANDSF provided logistical support for the fight against the Taliban. However, when ANDSF launched a clearing operation against the network in the wake of protests caused by the killing of more than 30 civilians by the network in 2016, the Taliban allegedly fought against ANSF, as they perceived the presence of government forces as a threat against their strongholds in neighbouring Charsadra district.¹⁸⁴⁸ Furthermore,

¹⁸³⁶ US Naval Postgraduate School, Ghor Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸³⁷ RFE/RL, Female Afghan Governor Won’t Back Down Amid Threats, Controversy, 19 October 2015, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁸ US Naval Postgraduate School, Ghor Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸³⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019, Introduction of Ghor Province, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁰ Salaam Times, Government development projects gave Herat residence hope for future, 23 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴¹ New York Times (The), on Afghan highways, even the police fear Taliban’s toll collectors, 12 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴² Salaam Times, Taliban glorify destruction of vital roads in Nimruz and Ghor provinces, 5 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴³ Afghanistan, ACAA, Aeronautical Information Publication, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁴ Kam Air, Book flight, Kam Air news, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁵ Ruttig, T., The ‘Humvee Bomb’ Series: The October wave of Taleban attacks in 2017 context, AAN, 7 November 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁶ Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁷ New York Times (The), Seesaw Conflict With Taliban Takes Toll in Fallen Afghan District, 7 August 2017, [url](#); New York Times (The), No Justice, ‘No Value’ for Women in a Lawless Afghan Province, 7 July 2017, [url](#); IWPR, Afghanistan: Women

Abused in Lawless Ghor, 24 July 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Taliban courts seek to undermine Afghan judiciary, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁸ Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, [url](#)

according to an AAN report of 2017, an MP from Ghor province stated that affiliates of Hezb-e Islami, a rival party to Jamiat-e Islami, distributed a large quantity of weapons to their supporters in Ghor.¹⁸⁴⁹ According to Pajhwok Afghan News, two sons of a former Hezb-e Islami commander died in a clash with Taliban insurgents in January 2018. The fighting reportedly erupted over the collection of *ushr* taxes, a leadership dispute between the former Hezb-e Islami commander and Taliban insurgents.¹⁸⁵⁰

In August 2019, Etilaatroz cited Mohammad Mehdi, deputy provincial council for Ghor province, stating that the Taliban strength in Ghor province has weakened after Mawlawi Zarif deputy [commander] of Red Unit of the Taliban militants has been killed by the security forces. According to the source Mehdi indicated [informal translation] 'government and public uprising forces control Tolak, Shahrak, Saghar, Tyora, Pasaband, Dawlatyar district centres.' According to the source, Mehdi added that due to the lack of security forces, the Taliban are present in remote areas of Ghor province and public uprising forces keep the security of governmental buildings in the province. The source also cited Abdul Rahim Rezazadeh, member of provincial council of Ghor, confirming the presence of Taliban in remote areas of Ghor province.¹⁸⁵¹ Taliban claimed that in 2019 they took the control of Charsadra district centre of Ghor province.¹⁸⁵²

In January 2020, around 70 Taliban fighters surrendered to the government forces in Ghor province due to continued military pressure by the ANDSF.¹⁸⁵³ According to Kabul Now (local media), in February 2020, the Taliban maintained full control in many Ghor districts.¹⁸⁵⁴ During the same period, AAN reported that there were several fighting actors present in many of the nine remote districts of Ghor province, including illegal and criminal armed groups, the Taliban and ANDSF.¹⁸⁵⁵

In March 2020, Ariana News quoted MoD claiming the killing of *Qari* Rauf, a Taliban shadow governor for Lal Wa Sarjangal district, and several other Taliban fighters including *Qari* Niyatullah from Zarzughal village and IEDs fabricator for Taliban.¹⁸⁵⁶

In May 2020, the UN Security Council indicated that the Taliban shadow governor for Ghor was Mawlawi Abdul Qayum Rohani Noorzai.¹⁸⁵⁷ In June 2020, Afghanistan Times cited Fakhruddin, police chief of Pasaband district, stating that the deputy governor of Taliban for Ghor province was Mullah Ahmadshah¹⁸⁵⁸, who entered Pasaband district with the Taliban shadow governor and over 200 militants on motorbikes.¹⁸⁵⁹

Taliban claimed having captured Murghab district of Ghor province on 17 August 2020 after a heavy fight,¹⁸⁶⁰ which the Afghan government reportedly acknowledged and recaptured the district the following day on 18 August 2020.¹⁸⁶¹

¹⁸⁴⁹ Ruttig, T., A Matter of Registration: Factional tensions in Hezb-e Islami, AAN, 25 November 2017, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill HIA commander's sons in Ghor clash, 13 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵¹ Etilaatroz, *بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه* [informal translation: 'security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban's mobility to heavy losses of the group'], 30 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵² Voice of Jihad, *د تېر کال فتوحاتو ته ځغلنده کتنه* [informal translation: 'a quick look at last year's victories'], 31 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵³ Salaam Times, Increased military pressure forces 70 Taliban fighters to surrender in Ghor, 14 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁴ Kabul Now, Women exchanged for weapons in parts of Ghor, 1 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁵ AAN, Placating Ghor, for now: ten-days protest pushed the government to respond, 5 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁶ Ariana News, Taliban shadow district governor among 10 dead – Ghor, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁷ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁸⁵⁸ Afghanistan Times, Seven security forces killed in Ghor Taliban attack, 13 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁹ Afghanistan times, Ghor's Pasaband district at risk of collapse to Taliban, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁰ Voice of Jihad, Afghanistan in the month of August 2020, 5 September 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶¹ Tolonews, Officials: Govt retakes Ghor's Murghab district from Taliban, 18 August 2020, [url](#)

A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021¹⁸⁶² designated 52.82 % of Ghor's territory under government control, 45.36 % under Taliban control and 1.82 % under the control of no side. According to the same survey, 403 780 of Ghor's inhabitants lived in areas under government control, 346 792 of the province's population lived in areas under Taliban control and 13 899 of Ghor's population lived in areas controlled by neither side.¹⁸⁶³

As of 28 February 2021, assessment by the LWJ, presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Tulak, Dawlatyar, Pasaband, Charsada and Taywara districts as 'contested' and the remaining districts as under 'GoA control or undetermined'. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Dawlatyar and Charsada districts shifted to 'GoA control or undetermined', and Saghar district as 'contested'.¹⁸⁶⁴

In February 2021, Tolonews cited Amrullah Saleh, the first Vice-President declaring a ban on the activities of *Hizb ut-Tahrir* (a radicalised Salafi group¹⁸⁶⁵) in Afghanistan including in Ghor province.¹⁸⁶⁶

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Ghor province increased by 45 %.¹⁸⁶⁷

The 207th Zafar Corps is in charge of ANA operations in the province of Ghor¹⁸⁶⁸ and its first regiment is based in Ghor province to maintain security.¹⁸⁶⁹ As part of the NATO Resolute Support (RS), Italian forces provide 'functionality-based' security assistance to ANA 207th Corps and ANP in the west of Afghanistan including Ghor.¹⁸⁷⁰

2.11.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 270 civilian casualties, including 59 killed and 211 injured in Ghor province, which represents a 251 % increase compared to 2019. The leading causes of casualties were non-suicide IEDs, ground engagements, and threats/intimidation/harassment.¹⁸⁷¹ According to SIGAR, RS (Resolute Support) recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Ghor province during the first quarter of 2020¹⁸⁷², and the mentioned source recorded between 51 and 75 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020.¹⁸⁷³ During the second half of 2020, no RS information on civilian casualties per province was available in SIGAR quarterly reports.¹⁸⁷⁴

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data from reports in open sources on 136 incidents related to insurgents in Ghor province, of which 86 were coded as 'battles',

¹⁸⁶² For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephone interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country; Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁴ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#).

¹⁸⁶⁵ RFE/RL, The dilemma of moving primary education to mosques in Afghanistan, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁶ Tolonews, Saleh calls an end to Hizb ut-Tahrir activity in Afghanistan, 28 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁷ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁸⁶⁸ Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url](#); USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 59

¹⁸⁶⁹ Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁸⁷¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

¹⁸⁷² SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

¹⁸⁷³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹⁸⁷⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

39 as ‘explosions/remote violence’, 10 as ‘violence against civilians’, and one concerned a riot over food distribution.¹⁸⁷⁵

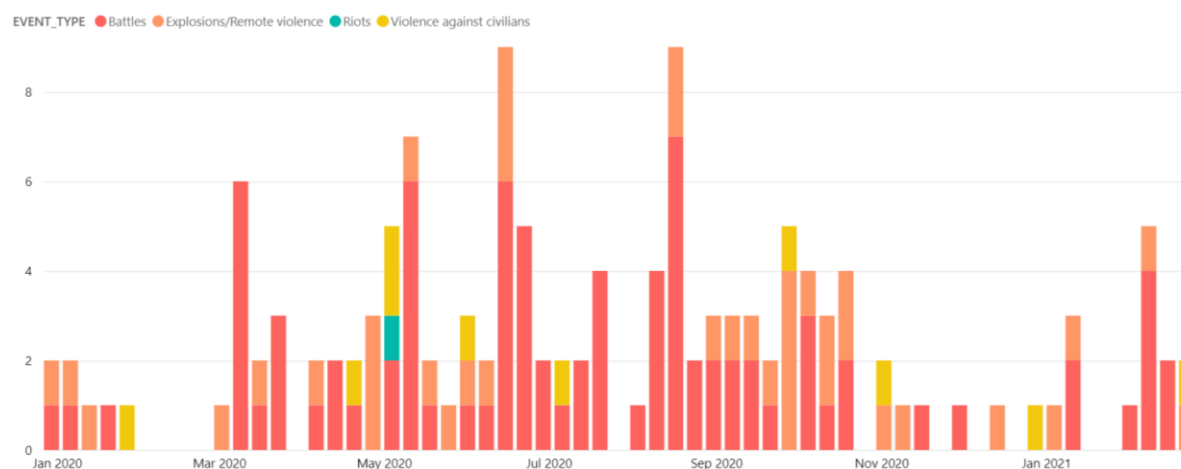


Figure 22: Ghor province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁸⁷⁶

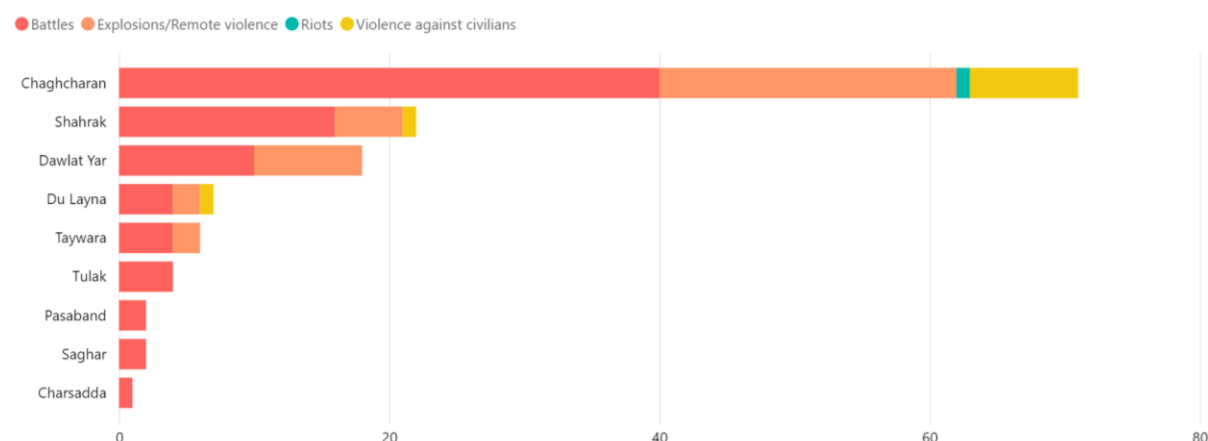


Figure 23: Ghor province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data¹⁸⁷⁷

Regarding the battles, nearly all concerned ‘armed clashes’. The majority of these armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS personnel. Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED in Ghor.¹⁸⁷⁸

¹⁸⁷⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghor province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghor province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghor province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 3 battles in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

¹⁸⁷⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghor province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

Roadside bombs or IEDs represented around 20 % of all reported security incidents in Ghor.¹⁸⁷⁹ For example: on 29 May 2020, one child was killed and another was injured in a bomb blast in Pozalich village of Firozkoh, the provincial capital; on 10 June 2020, a bomb, reportedly planted by the Taliban, exploded in Tarbulaq village of Du Layna district, killing one child and wounding three others; on 17 June 2020, a roadside bomb, planted by the Taliban, went off in the village of Pa-i Kamar in Firozkoh (Chaghcharan) district killing three children¹⁸⁸⁰; on 19 June 2020, a roadside bomb planted by the Taliban went off in Somak village of Dawlatyar district killing one civilian on his motorcycle.¹⁸⁸¹ On 20 August 2020, a roadside bomb blast killed seven civilians including three women and two children in Badgah village of Firozkoh¹⁸⁸²; on 28 September 2020, in two separate Taliban roadside bomb explosions in Ghor, a man and a woman were killed in Awlad-e Khairullah village of Dawlatyar district and two children were killed in Pay-e Hesar village in Taywara district; on 29 September 2020, a roadside bomb, placed by the Taliban, exploded and killed one civilian in Awlad-e Khairullah village in Dawlatyar district¹⁸⁸³; on 9 October 2020, a roadside bomb explosion killed a civilian after the latter stepped on the bomb placed by the Taliban in Madrasah village in Firozkoh¹⁸⁸⁴; on 18 October 2020, a vehicle-borne IED blast, which targeted ANP provincial headquarters in Chaghcharan city, killed 15 civilians and injured 173 others, including 125 men, 33 boys, 9 girls and 6 women. It was the single attack which caused the most civilian casualties in 2020. No party has claimed responsibility for the incident;¹⁸⁸⁵ on 25 October 2020, a roadside bomb blast killed a child aged ten in Shah Bidak village in Firozkoh;¹⁸⁸⁶ on 7 November 2020, a roadside bomb explosion killed two civilians on a motorcycle in Firozkoh.¹⁸⁸⁷

Shelling, artillery and missile attacks by the Taliban represented 1.30 % of all registered incidents in Ghor.¹⁸⁸⁸ For instance, on 10 August 2020, five civilians were killed including two women and three children in Qaziha village in Dawlatyar district after a mortar hit their house during clashes between the Taliban and ANSF.¹⁸⁸⁹

During the reporting period, air/drone strikes represented 5 % of all registered incidents in Ghor.¹⁸⁹⁰

ACLED categorised 6 % of all violent events recorded in Ghor as 'violence against civilians'.¹⁸⁹¹ For instance: on 6 June 2020, the Taliban kidnapped and killed a civilian man in Shaidan village in Dow Lina district in Ghor province;¹⁸⁹² on 30 September 2020, the Taliban killed a civilian in Dahan Tafragh village of Firozkoh, who was accused of collaborating with the government;¹⁸⁹³ on 1 January 2021, local Taliban commanders reportedly killed a journalist named Bismillah Adel Aimaq in Tighi Timor village at West of Firozkoh and the group returned on 2 March 2021 and killed his brother, a niece and a cousin as well.¹⁸⁹⁴ On 10 March 2021, unknown gunmen killed two civilians including an

¹⁸⁷⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghor province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 56

¹⁸⁸⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 26 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghor province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghor province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Ghor province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁴ Salaam Times, 2 months after killing reporter in Ghor, Taliban return to kill his family, 2 March 2021, [url](#)

employee of a health department in Kotal-e Shaidan village in Du Layna District; on 11 March 2021, the Taliban killed in a gunfire a teacher and a pro-government militia member in Maidan-e Bara Khana village in Firozkoh.¹⁸⁹⁵

In May 2020, Afghanistan Times reported on an increasing number of informal courts in Ghor province, where local religious and tribal leaders or influential figures punish people accused of crimes.¹⁸⁹⁶

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data from the period 1 January – 28 February 2021, reporting 13 731 persons displaced from Ghor province, with 90 % displaced within the province itself (mainly in Chaghcharan), 9.70 % displaced into Herat and the remaining 0.30 % displaced into Faryab province.¹⁸⁹⁷

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January – 28 February 2021, reporting 12 786 persons displaced to Ghor province, with almost 97 % coming from within the province itself and the remaining 3 % coming from Badghis, Balkh, Daykundi, Faryab, Herat, Laghman and Sar-i Pul.¹⁸⁹⁸

According to UNOCHA, security situation in the West of Afghanistan including in Ghor province remained tense and unstable in July,¹⁸⁹⁹ October,¹⁹⁰⁰ November¹⁹⁰¹ and December 2020¹⁹⁰², January¹⁹⁰³ and February 2021¹⁹⁰⁴ with continued reports of IED attacks, illegal checkpoints and military operations in West of Afghanistan including in Ghor province.¹⁹⁰⁵

¹⁸⁹⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2021, 1 April 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁶ Afghanistan Times, Drumhead courts-martials in rise in Ghor, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 28 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 28 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 – 19 July 2020), 23 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (19 – 25 October 2020), 28 October 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 – 29 November 2020), 3 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹⁰² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 – 20 December 2020), 23 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

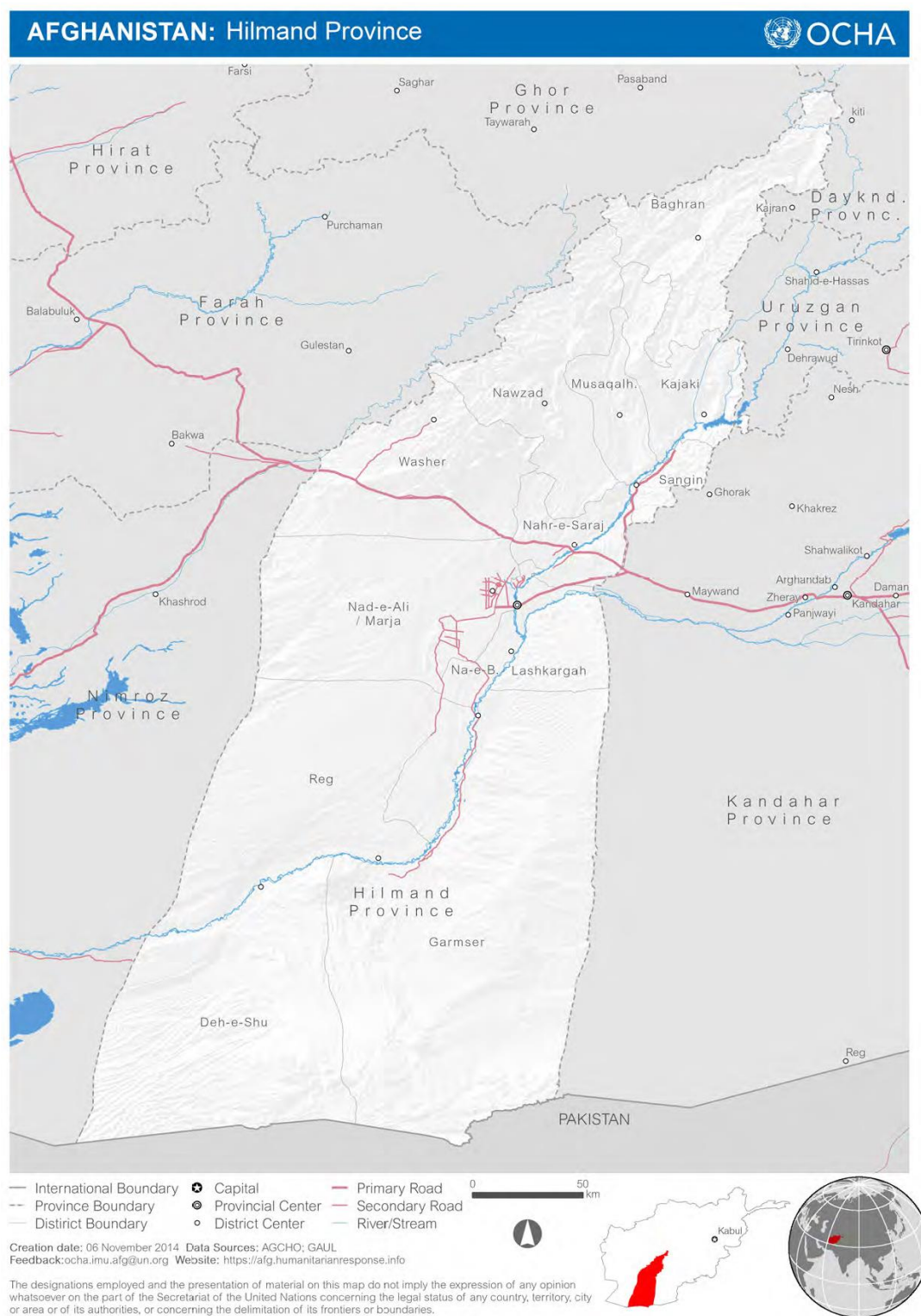
¹⁹⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 – 31 January 2021), 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (8 – 14 February 2021), 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (15 – 21 February 2021), 24 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 – 31 January 2021), 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

2.12 Helmand

2.12.1 General description of the province



Map 12: Afghanistan – Helmand province, source: UNOCHA¹⁹⁰⁶

¹⁹⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 11

The province of Helmand is situated in southern Afghanistan. In the south, Helmand shares a 162-kilometre border with Pakistan.¹⁹⁰⁷ Helmand is the largest province of Afghanistan.¹⁹⁰⁸ It is divided into the following administrative units: Nad Ali, Nawa-e-Barikzayi (Nawa), Nahr-e-Saraj (Gereshk/Grishk), Washer, Garm Ser, Nawzad, Sangin, Musa Qala, Kajaki, Reg-e-Khan Nishin (Reg), Baghran, Dishu, Lashkargah, Marja (temporary district), and Nawamish (temporary district). The provincial capital of Helmand is Lashkargah.¹⁹⁰⁹

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, Helmand province has a population of 1 420 682, with 190 555 of its residents living in the provincial capital Lashkargah.¹⁹¹⁰

The majority of Helmand's residents are reportedly Pashtuns, with a Baloch minority in the south at the border to the Pakistani province Balochistan¹⁹¹¹ and with some Hazara minority in the north.¹⁹¹² Most Pashtuns in the province belongs to Durrani tribes¹⁹¹³, including Alizai, Barakzai, Alakozai, Nurzai, Ishaqzai and several smaller tribes.¹⁹¹⁴ The Ishaqzai are allegedly '[...] one of the most religiously conservative tribes across Afghanistan'¹⁹¹⁵, with the late Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur belonging to this tribe.¹⁹¹⁶

A section of the Ring Road (Highway One) runs through the districts of Nahr-e-Saraj, Sangin and Washer¹⁹¹⁷, connecting major population centre Herat in the west with Kandahar in the east and eventually the capital Kabul.¹⁹¹⁸ According to Tolo News, as of January 2020, the five districts, Khanashin, Baghran, Musa Qala, Nawzad and Disho, had no road access due to Taliban presence.¹⁹¹⁹ A domestic scheduled passenger flight service reportedly exists in Helmand's capital Lashkargah, connecting the city with Kabul.¹⁹²⁰

2.12.2 Conflict background and actors in Helmand

Taliban restarted its activity in Helmand between 2004 and 2006. The massive deployment of ISAF forces and heavy losses of Taliban didn't prevent the spread of insurgency.¹⁹²¹ In 2012, expert Antonio Giustozzi explained that the conflict in Helmand was driven by several factors including weak governance and corruption of the government, but also inter and intra tribal rivalries, competition between criminal networks over narcotic routes and resources, and outdated, dysfunctional social structures based on feudal landlords. Moreover, Taliban managed to receive large amounts of money from drug trade which made them self-sufficient.¹⁹²²

After U.S. and NATO combat mission formally ended in December 2014, the Taliban overran several 'chiefdoms' in Helmand, which had been under control of ANP, ALP and pro-government militia

¹⁹⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Recognition of southern Helmand province, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁸ Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 40

¹⁹¹⁰ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 36

¹⁹¹¹ US Naval Postgraduate School, Helmand Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹¹² Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹¹³ Giustozzi A. (ed), Decoding the New Taliban: insights from the Afghan field, Hurst & Co: London, 2009, [url](#), p. 122

¹⁹¹⁴ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁵ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁶ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#); Guardian (The), Why capturing Helmand is top of the Taleban's strategic goals, 26 December 2015, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁷ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁸ Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, [url](#); Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁹ Tolonews, Efforts Underway to Clear 5 Helmand Districts of Insurgents, 10 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁰ Sweden, Swedish Migration Agency, Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan, 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁹²¹ Giustozzi A. and Farrell T., The Taliban at war: inside the Helmand insurgency 2004-2012, Abstract, [url](#)

¹⁹²² Giustozzi A. (ed), Decoding the New Taliban: insights from the Afghan field, Hurst & Co: London, 2009, p. 151, [url](#)

commanders.¹⁹²³ In 2017, US Marines were deployed again in the province, reportedly in order to advise Afghan government forces and to increase air strikes without conducting ground operations on their own¹⁹²⁴ but the main aim was to secure the provincial capital Lashkargah from falling to the Taliban.¹⁹²⁵ Some other districts in the province, for example Nad Ali, have passed from hands to hands several times.¹⁹²⁶

In October 2020, Taliban started another major offensive against provincial capital, Lashkargah. Heavy clashes lasted several days and ANSDF was supported by US airstrikes. Humanitarian organisations reported massive displacement.¹⁹²⁷

Taliban managed to develop centralized structure and militarized shadow government in Helmand province.¹⁹²⁸ In 2017, BBC reported that the Taliban captured nearly 85% of the province, making the cities of Sangin and Musa Qala the centre of its command and commerce. According to locals interviewed by BBC, areas entirely under Taliban control experienced less fighting and there was a rise in trade but some personal freedoms were limited such as girls' education and healthcare for women.¹⁹²⁹ According to AAN analysis conducted in Nad Ali district and published in 2021, Taliban established tax collection and court system although it has no offices or court headquarters because of security reasons.¹⁹³⁰

A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021 designated 21.80% of Helmand territory and population under government control, 72.87% of territory and population under Taliban control and 5.33% territory and population controlled by neither side. The entire district and its centres under Taliban: Nawzad, Musa Qala, Baghran, Dishu and Reg-e-Khan Nishin.¹⁹³¹ As of 28 February 2021, an assessment by the LWJ, presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Baghran, Musa Qala, Nawzad, Sangin, Dishu, Reg-e-Khan Nishin, as under 'Taliban control' and the rest of the districts as 'contested'. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Kajaki district shifted to under the 'Taliban control' and Lashkargah as 'contested'.¹⁹³² Early on 1 May 2021, Taliban reportedly carried out 'large scale attacks against security belt of Lashkargah city' on highway 611, and as well as on Gereshk and Nawa districts, where 12 checkpoints were captured by the Taliban.¹⁹³³

On 13 May 2021, following Taliban's offensive on Lashkargah, the group took the city under siege against few GoA soldiers, who remained as the last defence front.¹⁹³⁴ On 25 May 2021, Bilal Sarwary quoted Sami Sadat, commanding general of the 215 Maiwand Corps, stating that the Taliban carried out 390 attacks in Helmand province in seven days, mostly against Nawa, Nihar-ul Siraj and Lashkargah. ANSDF reportedly pushed back these attacks.¹⁹³⁵

¹⁹²³ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#); Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, AAN, 11 March 2016, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁴ Task & Purpose, The Marines Returned To Helmand Province. Is Their Mission A Blueprint For Trump's Afghanistan Strategy?, 15 November 2017, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁵ Task & Purpose, The Marines Returned To Helmand Province. Is Their Mission A Blueprint For Trump's Afghanistan Strategy?, 15 November 2017 [url](#); Quilty A., Static War: Helmand after the US Marines' return, 23 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁶ AAN, Living with the Taleban (2): Local experiences in Nad Ali district, Helmand province, 18 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁷ BBC News, Afghan-Taliban conflict: Fears grow for families trapped in Helmand, 15 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁸ Giustozzi A. and Farrell T., The Taliban at war: inside the Helmand insurgency 2004-2012, Abstract, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁹ BBC News, Taliban territory: Life in Afghanistan under the militants, 8 June 2017, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁰ AAN, Living with the Taleban (2): Local experiences in Nad Ali district, Helmand province, 18 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³² LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

¹⁹³³ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 3 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁴ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: on 13 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁵ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 25 May 2021, [url](#)

According to local authorities, Al Qaida is present in the province, providing 'military and financial support' for Taliban. There are reportedly some training camps in Dishu district.¹⁹³⁶ Governor of Helmand accused Taliban of cooperation with Al Qaeda during the military offensive in October 2020. He claimed that foreign fighters took part in the attacks in the province. Taliban however insisted that its forces were recruited locally.¹⁹³⁷

There is no known presence of ISIL-KP in Helmand. UNAMA did not documented civilian casualties from ISIL-KP attacks in Helmand in 2019 or 2020.¹⁹³⁸

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Helmand province increased by 27 % and it 'remained the country's major opium poppy cultivating province'.¹⁹³⁹

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Helmand province is under the responsibility of the 215th ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southwest (TF Southwest), led by US forces.¹⁹⁴⁰ Following US-Taliban agreement signed in February 2020, US troops started leaving the military base in Lashkargah in March 2020.¹⁹⁴¹

Local provincial council authorities stated in January 2020 that ANA had too few troops to maintain or retake the checkpoints from Taliban but army officials denied this.¹⁹⁴² In November 2020, special forces were deployed in Helmand to protect Lashkargah. Military bases maintained by ANA are supplied by air because of the key roads blockades.¹⁹⁴³

On the government side, along with Afghan security forces such as the ANP, ALP, ANA, various pro-government 'uprising forces' take active part in fighting. One of the local initiatives of this type is also the Sangorian Group, a pro-government militia group¹⁹⁴⁴. At the beginning it turned to be effective but when clashes started in October 2020, they were not able to uphold checkpoints and surrendered them to Taliban without any fight.¹⁹⁴⁵

2.12.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 410 civilian casualties (214 deaths and 196 injured) in Helmand province. This represents a decrease of 39 % compared to 2019. According to UNAMA, leading causes of civilian casualties in 2020 were ground engagements, non-suicide IEDs and air strikes.¹⁹⁴⁶

¹⁹³⁶ Tolonews, Al Qaeda Training Taliban in Helmand: Local Officials, 30 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁷ Sky News, Al. Qaeda aiding Taliban in Helmand fight, Afghan governor claims, 2 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 43; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, February 2020, [url](#), p. 36

¹⁹³⁹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), pp. 5, 9

¹⁹⁴⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁹⁴¹ Bangkok Post, US begins military pullout from two Afghan bases 11 March 2020, [url](#); Stars and Stripes, US troops have left bases in Helmand, Laghman provinces, officials say, 13 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴² Tolonews, Efforts Underway to Clear 5 Helmand Districts of Insurgents, 10 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴³ Washington Post (The), With less U.S. tactical support, Afghanistan's elite forces are struggling to roll back Taliban advances, 7 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁴ Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 11 January 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Secret Afghan Force Mimics, Infiltrates Taliban, 15 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁵ Tolonews, Clashes in Lashkargah Continue on 5th Day of Helmand Fighting, 14 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2020, [url](#), p. 110

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED reported a total of 771 incidents related to security in Helmand province: 507 battles, 247 remote violence, 17 cases of violence against civilians.¹⁹⁴⁷

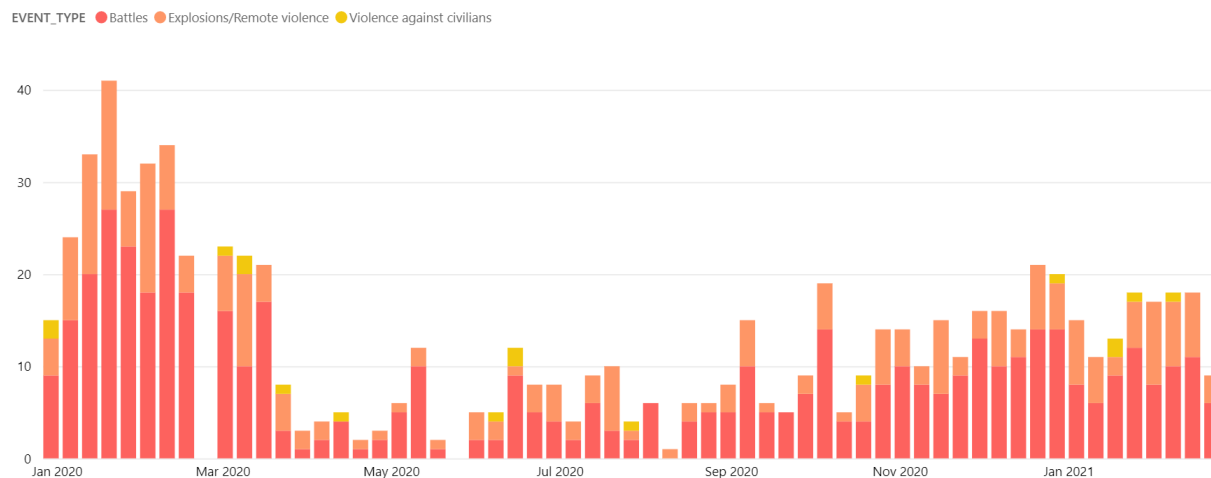


Figure 24: Helmand province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2020, based on ACLED data¹⁹⁴⁸

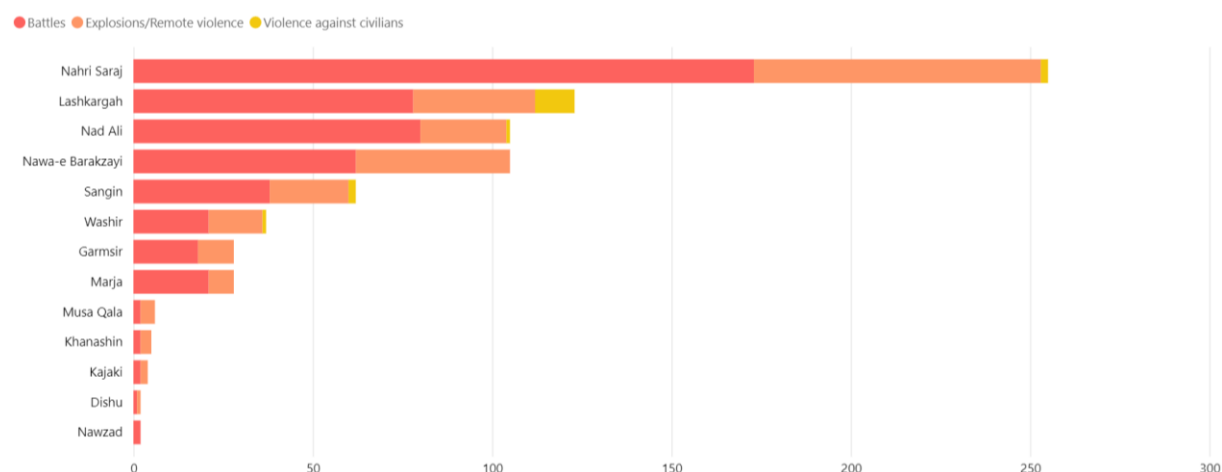


Figure 25: Helmand province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2020, based on ACLED data¹⁹⁴⁹

In the reporting period, clashes between security forces and AGEs took place mainly in Lashkargah city and districts: Nad Ali, Nawa-e Barikzayi and Nahr-e Saraj.¹⁹⁵⁰ In autumn, when intra-Afghan peace talks were beginning, Taliban fighting intensified in the province¹⁹⁵¹ and Taliban started ‘a

¹⁹⁴⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Helmand province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Helmand province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Helmand province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 9 events (7 battles and 2 remote violence) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

¹⁹⁵⁰ UNOCHA Afghanistan Weekly Humanitarian Update, Humanitarian Response, Situation Report, 01 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵¹ BBC News, Afghan-Taliban conflict: Families flee fresh fighting in Helmand, 13 October 2020, [url](#)

major offensive from different directions in bid to capture Lashkargah'.¹⁹⁵² According to Amnesty International, 'tens of thousands of people [were] trapped in the middle of a bloody battle that shows no sign of abating'.¹⁹⁵³ In the reporting period, Helmand was one of the provinces where the number of victims of ground engagements was the highest.¹⁹⁵⁴ In February 2021, the provincial capital was still surrounded by AGEs who controlled key roads leading to the city.¹⁹⁵⁵

In 2020, UNAMA reported 187 civilian casualties, including 81 fatalities resulting from ground engagements.¹⁹⁵⁶ For example, on 29 June 2020, in Sangin district of Helmand province, ANA forces fired three mortars that landed in a busy marketplace, killing 19 civilians (including 6 children), and injuring 31 others (including 11 children).¹⁹⁵⁷ On 8 January 2021, five civilians, including children, were killed by Afghan forces during the air raid in Lashkargah.¹⁹⁵⁸

According to UNAMA, in 2020 in Helmand province 87 persons were killed and 52 injured as a consequence of IEDs' explosions.¹⁹⁵⁹ For instance, on 25 March 2020 at least eight civilians were killed after the explosion of a roadside bomb in Musa Qala district.¹⁹⁶⁰ On 31 March 2020, eight other civilians were killed in an explosion in Nahr-e Saraj district.¹⁹⁶¹ UNAMA reported also several IEDs explosions during Taliban attack on Lashkargah in October 2020 which killed or injured civilians who were trying to escape from the fighting zone.¹⁹⁶² On 9 October 2020, five civilians were killed and nine wounded in the explosion of roadside bomb in also Nahr-e Saraj.¹⁹⁶³ On 12 October 2020, an explosion killed 15 civilians, including eight children, travelling through Marja district.¹⁹⁶⁴

AGEs targeted also selected groups of civilians in Helmand. There were reports of killings a tribal elder¹⁹⁶⁵, government officials¹⁹⁶⁶ and journalists¹⁹⁶⁷ in Lashkargah city during the reporting period.¹⁹⁶⁸ According to a Human Rights Watch report, any contact with the Afghan government for civilian population is prohibited in Taliban-controlled areas. For example, Taliban targeted a resident of Helmand whose relatives worked for the police and accused him of being 'a police spy'.¹⁹⁶⁹

According to Amnesty International, during the Taliban offensive on Lashkargah in October 2020, the power and telecommunication networks were cut off and roads were blocked so civilians couldn't escape from the city. People had to leave their houses and slept on the street. UNAMA called on

¹⁹⁵² A Jazeera, As violence flares in south Afghanistan, key questions answered, 19 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵³ BBC News, Afghan-Taliban conflict: Fears grow for families trapped in Helmand, 15 October 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Fear Grows Over Afghan Civilians 'Trapped' In Helmand's Capital, 15 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72

¹⁹⁵⁵ Washington Post (The), With less U.S. tactical support, Afghanistan's elite forces are struggling to roll back Taliban advances, 7 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72

¹⁹⁵⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report, 2020 Mid-year Update, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 15; Stars and Stripes, Afghan forces launched mortar attacks that killed civilians in Helmand, UN says, 30 June 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 23 Civilians Killed in Rocket Attacks in Helmand 29 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁸ AA, 'Kids among 5 of a family killed in Afghan airstrike', 8 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 49

¹⁹⁶⁰ Afghanistan Times, 8 killed in Helmand after vehicle hit by roadside bomb, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶¹ SATP, Helmand Timeline 2020, 22 May 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 50

¹⁹⁶³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Helmand province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 50

¹⁹⁶⁵ Khaama Press, Two Separate Attacks Claim Civil Society Activist, Tribal Leader, 01 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Washer district chief killed, guards wounded, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁷ Khaama Press, Media staff killed in Afghanistan's southern province Helmand, 2 January 2020, [url](#); BBC News, The assassination of a 'Brave Journalist of Afghanistan', 23 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Helmand province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁹ HRW, "You Have No Right to Complain" Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-7

making 'safe paths for those wishing to leave'.¹⁹⁷⁰ Access to health services was limited.¹⁹⁷¹ WHO reported 15 health care facilities in several districts were attacked and temporary closed.¹⁹⁷² Taliban destroyed several bridges over the main highway during their last offensive.¹⁹⁷³

In the villages under Taliban control, they used civilian neighbourhood for military purposes and punished residents who tried to oppose.¹⁹⁷⁴ Access to cultivation areas were restricted by IEDs.¹⁹⁷⁵ There were cases when Taliban tried to intimidate the workers of de-mining NGOs in Gereshk (Nahr-e Saraj) district.¹⁹⁷⁶

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 31 551 persons displaced from Helmand province. 29 206 persons were displaced within the province itself from different localities mainly to Lashkargah and Washer district. 2 345 persons were displaced from Helmand to other provinces: Kandahar, Herat and Nimroz. The largest group of people were displaced within Lashkargah at the beginning of Taliban offensive on 11 October 2020.¹⁹⁷⁷ According to various sources, between 20 000 and 40 000 people were forced to leave their homes in the city.¹⁹⁷⁸

In the reporting period 103 persons arrived to the Helmand's district Nahr-e Saraj from Daykundi province in January 2020.¹⁹⁷⁹

¹⁹⁷⁰ BBC News, Afghan-Taliban conflict: Fears grow for families trapped in Helmand, 15 October 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Fear Grows Over Afghan Civilians 'Trapped' In Helmand's Capital, 15 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Humanitarian Update, 2-8 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Flash Update No. 5, Fighting, displacement and civilian casualties in Southern Afghanistan, 26 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷³ Al-Arabiya, In spite of truce talks, US forces hit Taliban with air strikes in Helmand, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁴ HRW, "You Have No Right to Complain" Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 53-54; AAN, Living with the Taleban (2): Local experiences in Nad Ali district, Helmand province, 18 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Humanitarian Update, 14-20 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁶ HRW, "You Have No Right to Complain" Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), p. 44

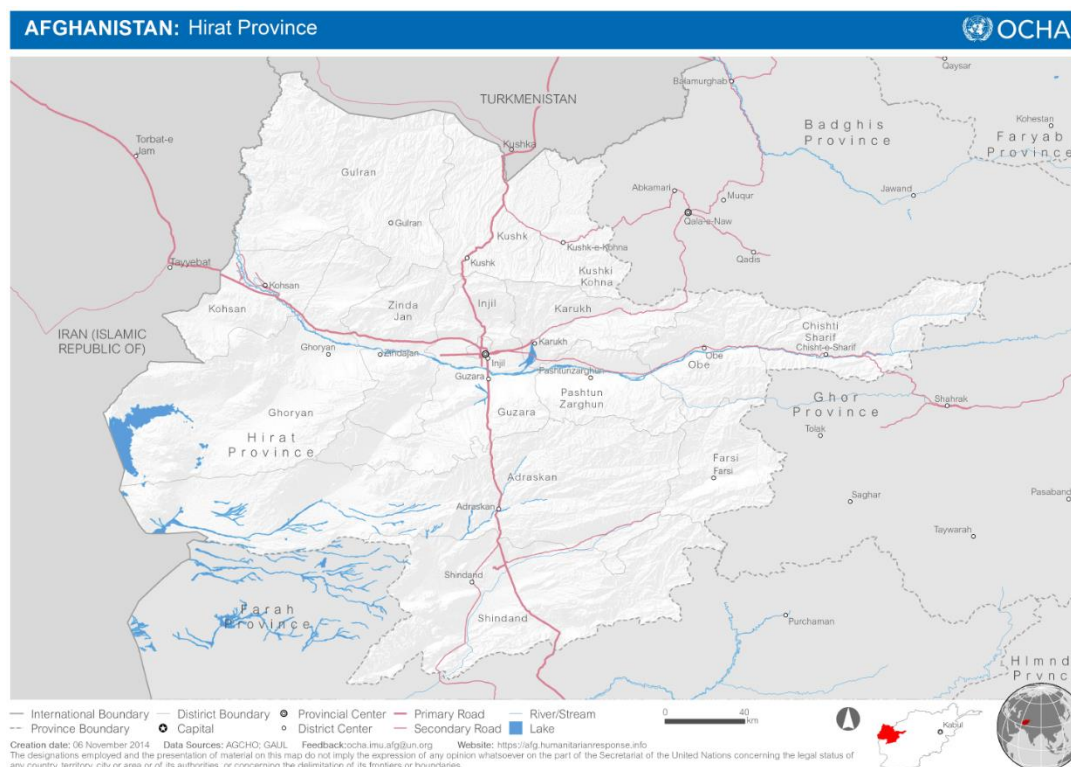
¹⁹⁷⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#); Christian Science Monitor (The), Fleeing the Taliban in the night, a family's faith in peace wavers, 23 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

2.13 Herat

2.13.1 General description of the province



Map 13: Afghanistan – Herat province, source: UNOCHA¹⁹⁸⁰

Herat (Hirat) Province is located in the western part of Afghanistan and borders Iran to the west and Turkmenistan to the north.¹⁹⁸¹ The administrative districts of the province are Adraskan, Chisht-e Sharif, Fersi (Farsi), Ghoryan (Ghorian), Gulran (Golran), Guzara (Gozareh), Injil (Enjil), Herat, Karukh, Kohsan (Kuhestan), Kushk (Robat-e Sangi), Kushk-e Kuhna, Obe (Obah), Pashtun Zarghun, Zinda Jan (Zendahjan); the districts of Shindand, Poshtko (Pushtko), Koh-e Zore (Koh-e Zawar), Zawol, and Zerko are defined as 'temporary' districts. The provincial capital is Herat city.¹⁹⁸²

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 2 095 117.¹⁹⁸³

The main ethnic groups in Herat are Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Aimaqs. Pashtuns are the majority in 11 border districts;¹⁹⁸⁴ in 2015, it was estimated that Hazaras, who are mostly Shia Muslims, might constitute up to a fourth of the urban population of the province.¹⁹⁸⁵

The population of Herat city is largely 'either Sunni or Shia Farsiwans' (Persian speakers), with Sunni Farsiwans tending to identify as Tajiks.¹⁹⁸⁶ The city has a significant Pashtun minority¹⁹⁸⁷ as well as

¹⁹⁸⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Provincial reference Map, Hirat Province 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁹⁸¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Provincial reference Map, Hirat Province 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁹⁸² Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 42

¹⁹⁸³ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 38

¹⁹⁸⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Herat province, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁵ Leslie, J., Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, USIP, 2 April 2015, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁹⁸⁶ Foschini, F., Back to Stopgap Appointments? The Story behind the Replacement of Herat's Governor, AAN, 24 July 2013, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁷ Foschini, F., Back to Stopgap Appointments? The Story behind the Replacement of Herat's Governor, AAN, 24 July 2013, [url](#); Leslie, J., Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, USIP, 2 April 2015, [url](#), pp. 8, 13

Hazara and Aimaq ethnic groups.¹⁹⁸⁸ The share of Hazaras, who are considered newcomers, has been increasing since 2001, due to repatriation from Iran and displacement from central provinces of Afghanistan.¹⁹⁸⁹

A ring road connects Herat Province to Farah and Kandahar provinces. Primary roads connect Herat to Islam Qala (border crossing with Iran) and Turghundi (border crossing with Turkmenistan). Mountainous roads connecting Herat to the provincial capitals of Ghor and Badghis were reported to be in a poor condition.¹⁹⁹⁰

In December 2020, a 225-kilometre-long railway connecting Herat province with the city of Khaf in north-eastern Iran was inaugurated. While the construction of the three sections covering around 150 kilometres from Khaf to the city of Rozanak in Herat was finalised,¹⁹⁹¹ the line is scheduled to be extended to Robat Paryan and Herat Airport.¹⁹⁹²

Herat International Airport, named after Khwaja Abdullah Ansari in January 2021¹⁹⁹³, is one of Afghanistan's four international airports.¹⁹⁹⁴ The airport is located about 19 kilometres south of Herat city.¹⁹⁹⁵

2.13.2 Conflict background and armed actors in Herat

Reporting on a killing of a Taliban leader in a drone strike in Herat in December 2018, the Khaama Press noted that Herat was 'among the relatively calm provinces in the west of Afghanistan'; still, according to the source, the Taliban insurgents were 'active in some of its the remote districts'.¹⁹⁹⁶ The deterioration of the security situation in Herat province was reported in 2016 with insurgent groups establishing their control in such districts as Shindand, Adraskan, Gulran, Kushke-e Kuhna, and Farsi and violent clashes occurring between the GoA and the Taliban and between rival Taliban fractions.¹⁹⁹⁷ The infighting between the main Taliban group, the Quetta Shura, and militants led by Mullah Muhammad Rasoul (Rasool), was reported to continue in the subsequent years.¹⁹⁹⁸ According to AAN reporting in October 2018, 'large swathes of territory' in Herat—and particularly the areas distant from the provincial and district centres—were 'either contested or partially or completely controlled' by the Taliban.¹⁹⁹⁹ In August 2019, a member of Herat provincial council stated that the Taliban was present in the districts of Shindand, Kushk-e Kuhna, Gulran, Robat-e Sangi (Kushk), Pashtun Zarghun, Adraskan, and Fersi and established checkpoints on the Herat-Islam Qala Highway, noting that the government kept its control over all district capitals.²⁰⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸⁸ Leslie, J., Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, USIP, 2 April 2015, [url](#), pp. 8, 13

¹⁹⁸⁹ Kazemi, R.S., Speculation Abounding: Trying to make sense of the attacks against Shias in Herat city, AAN, 3 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁰ Logistics Capacity Assessment, Afghanistan Road Network, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹⁹¹ France 24, First rail network opens between Iran and Afghanistan, 10 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹² Railway Gazette, Two presidents inaugurate Afghanistan – Iran railway, 10 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹³ Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of, President Ghani Names Herat International Airport after Khwaja Abdullah Ansari, 21 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁴ SIGAR, Afghanistan's Civilian Aviation: Capacity has improved but challenges remain, including reliance on donor support for operations, July 2019, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁹⁹⁵ Afghanistan, ACAA, AIRAC AIP Amendment, 28 January 2021, [url](#), p. 65

¹⁹⁹⁶ Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban leader killed in Herat drone strike, 17 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁷ Kazemi, R.S., The Battle between Law and Force: Scattered political power and deteriorating security test Herat's dynamism, AAN, 11 January 2017, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁸ Salaam Times, Taliban infighting over power, leadership continues in Herat, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁹ Kazemi, R.S., The 2018 Election Observed (6) in Herat: Insecurity, organisational shambles, alleged rigging, AAN, 20 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁰ Etlaatroz, *بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه* [informal translation: 'security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban's mobility to heavy losses of the group'], 30 August 2019, [url](#)

In January 2020, a regional commander of Mullah Muhammad Rassoul fraction Mullah Mohammad Nangyalai was reportedly killed by a U.S. drone strike. According to the U.S. independent military news source Stars and Stripes, the Rasoul insurgent group continued fighting the main Taliban group in Herat, although the infighting between the two became less frequent compared to previous years.²⁰⁰¹

According to the report of the UN Security Council, the Taliban shadow governor for Herat as of May 2020 was Mawlawi Abdul Rashid.²⁰⁰² In May 2020, the National Directorate of Security (NDS) reported on an arrest of Qari Shafi (also known as Hafiz Omeri), a Taliban commander and a key member of the Taliban's leadership commission, in Shindand district.²⁰⁰³

As of 28 February 2021, LWJ assessed the districts of Gulran, Kushk, Kushk-e Kuhna, Obe, Adraskan, Shindand, and Ghoryan as 'contested', the district of Farsi as under 'unconfirmable Taliban claim of control', and the districts of Kohsan, Zinda Jan, Injil, Herat, Karukh, Pashtun Zarghun, Guzara, and Chisht-e Sharif as under 'GoA control or undetermined.' More recently, as of 26 of May 2021, Pashtun Zarghun and Chisht-e Sharif districts shifted to 'contested'.²⁰⁰⁴ A survey conducted by Pajhwok Afghan News from November 2020 until February 2021, designated 37.25 % of Herat's territory as controlled by the Afghan government and 62.75 % as under the Taliban control. According to the same survey, 1 157 755 of Herat's inhabitants lived in areas controlled by the government and 982 907 in areas under the Taliban control.²⁰⁰⁵

While there were no reports of an established presence of ISKP in Herat in the reporting period, the group claimed responsibility over an IED explosion in a Shia-dominated area in Herat city on 29 July 2020.²⁰⁰⁶ The blog kept by the Swiss Institute for Global Affairs mentioned that the cells of 'alleged Daesh groups' in Herat province were of 'a more unclear extent' than those in and around Kabul city; still, as pointed out by the blog, the group claimed responsibility over two attacks conducted in Herat between 1 August and 28 October 2020.²⁰⁰⁷

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Herat province increased by 30 %.²⁰⁰⁸

In terms of the presence of the government security forces, the ANA operations in Herat were under the responsibility of the 207th Zafar Corps.²⁰⁰⁹ Italian forces provided 'functionality-based' security assistance to ANA 207th Corps and ANP, as a part of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission.²⁰¹⁰

²⁰⁰¹ Stars and Stripes, Airstrike in western Afghanistan kills leader of Taliban splinter group, may have killed civilians, 9 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁰² UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 27

²⁰⁰³ Tolonews, "Key" Taliban member arrested in Herat by NDS, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁴ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#), accessed 28 February 2021. The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the map was updated.

²⁰⁰⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#). For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephone interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country.

²⁰⁰⁶ Salaam Times, Fractured ISIS-K struggles to keep up appearances in Afghanistan, 7 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁷ Swiss Institute for Global Affairs, The Opaque Remnants of the Self-Declared Islamic State in Afghanistan, updated 10 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁸ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²⁰⁰⁹ Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url](#); USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 59

²⁰¹⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

2.13.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 339 civilian casualties, including 124 killed and 215 injured, in Herat province, which represents a 15 % decline compared to 2019. The leading causes of civilian casualties were ground engagements, targeted killings, and non-suicide IEDs.²⁰¹¹ Reporting in April 2020 on the security situation in the provinces after the U.S.-Taliban agreement, Kate Clark noted that two AAN interviewees in Herat reported on the intensification of violence. According to a GoA employee, the district of Obe was 'entirely in Taleban hands, except for the district centre.'²⁰¹²

According to ACLED data, between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021 there were 362 security incidents recorded in Herat province, of which 232 were coded as 'battles', 95 as 'explosions/remote violence', 32 as 'violence against civilians' and 3 concerned prison riots.²⁰¹³

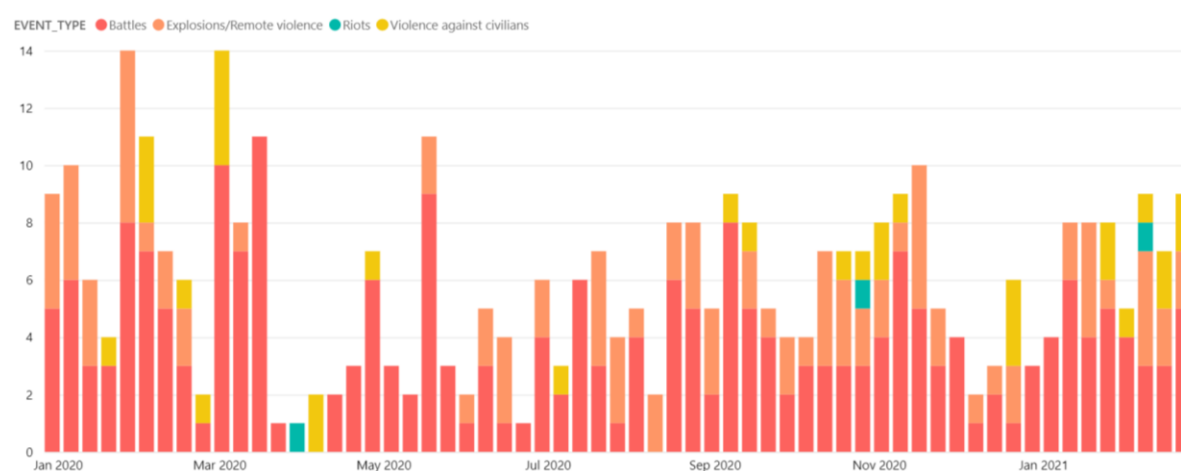


Figure 26: Herat province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2020, based on ACLED data²⁰¹⁴

²⁰¹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

²⁰¹² Clark, K., Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (2): Assessing the conflict a month after the US-Taliban agreement, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁰¹³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Herat province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Herat province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

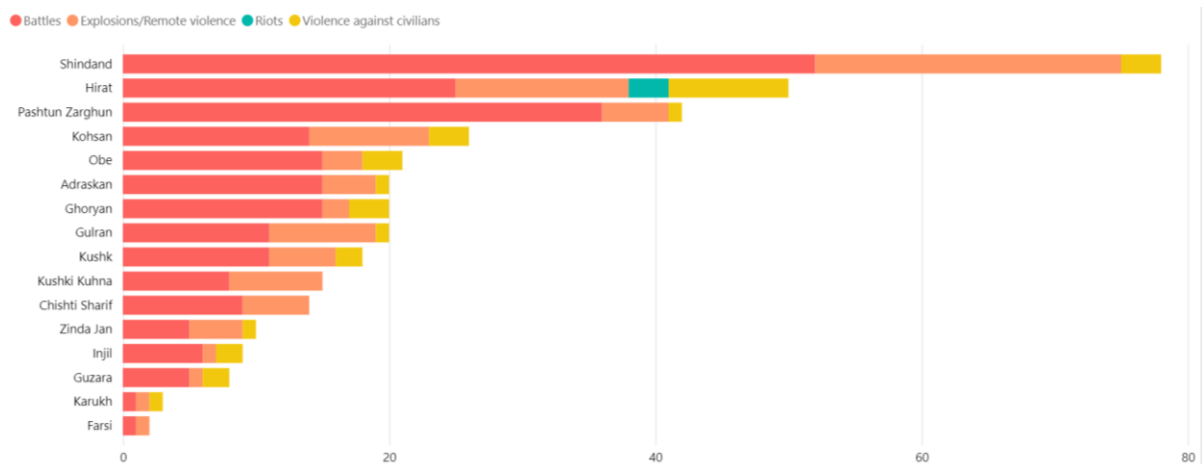


Figure 27: Herat province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2020, based on ACLED data²⁰¹⁵

The vast majority of battles concerned ‘armed clashes.’²⁰¹⁶ After the RIV, the Taliban reportedly attacked ‘government convoy going from Herat city to Chesht-e Sharif district through Pashtun Zargun and Obeh district,’ which caused casualties on both sides. Between Pashtun Zargun and Obe, the convoy reportedly ‘fired mortars on Taleban areas, injuring some civilians and damaging some civilian houses.’²⁰¹⁷ Other incidents which caused civilian casualties during the reporting period comprised, but were not limited to the following: on 14 June 2020, during the clashes between the Taliban and ANSF, a civilian was killed in the village of Band-e Benafsh in Obe district;²⁰¹⁸ in September 2020, three civilians were killed and four injured, including two children, in the armed clashes in the Noorzai Ha area in Kushk district;²⁰¹⁹ on 16 January 2021, during clashes between ANDSF and the Taliban in the village of Qodus Abad in Kohsan District, a mortar fired by the Taliban reportedly hit a house, killing a woman and wounding 11 civilians, including women and children.²⁰²⁰

As reported by AAN researcher Reza Kazemi, on 17 February 2020, at least five civilians were killed in ‘one or several airstrikes by Afghan or NATO forces’ in Kushk.²⁰²¹

In the EASO reporting period, the Taliban conducted numerous attacks on security forces’ compounds and checkpoints located in Herat province²⁰²² and on military convoys;²⁰²³ in some cases, the attacks caused civilian casualties.²⁰²⁴ Thus, on 7 March 2020, the Taliban attacked a pro-government militia outpost in the village of Khawja-Noor in Kushk district, resulting in one militia member being killed and 11 civilians injured. Following the attack, the Taliban abducted six civilians,

²⁰¹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Herat province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 6 events (3 battles and 3 remote violence incidents) in the province, for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction).

²⁰¹⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Herat province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁷ Clark, K., Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (2): Assessing the conflict a month after the US-Taliban agreement, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 – 27 September 2020), 27 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰²⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁰²¹ Kazemi, R., Disputed Casualties in Kushk: The cost of blurring lines between fighters and civilians, 25 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁰²² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, 12 February 2021, [url](#); Voice of Jihad, Check post stormed in Herat, 6 killed, [url](#), 11 February 2021

²⁰²³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁰²⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

including a teacher, killing all of them later.²⁰²⁵ On 14 May 2020, one woman was killed and two other civilians were injured when the Taliban opened fire on a security checkpoint in Sarak-e Naw village of Ghoryan district;²⁰²⁶ on 1 July 2020, a civilian was killed and nine security forces officers were injured in Fooshkan village of Pashton Zarghun district, after the Taliban attacked the ANSF convoy;²⁰²⁷ on 27 January 2021, a civilian was killed and a police officer injured in the Taliban attack over security forces in the village of Qala-i Reeg in Zinda Jan District;²⁰²⁸ on 8 February 2021, the Taliban attacked the Adraskan district compound, killing one police officer and injuring five other persons, including a civilian.²⁰²⁹

Some of the incidents of Taliban attacks on GoA security posts were connected to 'insider attacks'.²⁰³⁰ For instance, an insider attack on a security outpost in the village of Sarchishma in Gulran district on 14 June 2020 caused four casualties among police officers; three police officers were 'taken prisoner,' and three 'Taliban infiltrators', who committed the attack, joined the insurgency.²⁰³¹ On 16 January 2021 in Ghoryan district, 'Taliban fighters in security forces rank' were reported to enter 'the public uprising forces bases', killing at least 12 pro-government militiamen;²⁰³² following the attack, the Afghan government forces claimed to regain control of the area.²⁰³³

According to ACLED data, 'remote explosive/landmine/IEDs' were the cause of 60 security incidents, or 59 %, of the incidents coded as 'explosions/remote violence' in Herat province.²⁰³⁴ The representative cases of this type of security incidents comprise the following: on 9 October 2020, the civilian bus stuck a roadside bomb in the village of Sarayek in Zawol district, killing 3 and injuring 13 civilians;²⁰³⁵ on 14 October 2020, as reported by the New York Times, 7 civilians, travelling to a wedding party, were killed after their vehicle hit a roadside bomb in the village of Lar-e Sorkh in Kushk-e Kuhna district; 11 civilians were reportedly injured.²⁰³⁶ UNAMA described the bomb as 'a Taliban pressure-plate IED' and reported that the vehicle was 'filled with mostly women' who were 'on the way to accompany a bride to her new house,' 3 women and 5 girls were killed and four women, 7 children, and 1 man were injured in the incident.²⁰³⁷

While most of the incidents caused by IEDs across Afghanistan remained unclaimed, ISKP claimed a responsibility over an incident of 29 July 2020, in which an IED attached to a minibus killed three and injured five civilians, including one child, in the village of Mahal-e Haji Abbas in the 12th Police District of Herat city;²⁰³⁸ ISKP stated that their target was the Shi'a Muslim community.²⁰³⁹

The highway between Herat and Islam Qala, which is a key road to transport most of the import goods from Iran, was reportedly insecure due to the presence of the insurgent groups.²⁰⁴⁰ In April 2020, on the Herat-Islam Qala Highway in Kohsan district, three Taliban fighters abducted five

²⁰²⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁰²⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁰²⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁰²⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁰²⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 12 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁰³⁰ AP, Official: 2 insider attackers kill 12 Afghan militiamen, 16 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁰³¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁰³² Pajhwok Afghan News, Over a dozen pro-govt forces killed in Herat attack, 16 January 2021 [url](#)

²⁰³³ AP, Official: 2 insider attackers kill 12 Afghan militiamen, 16 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁰³⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Herat province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁰³⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁰³⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁰³⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), p. 48

²⁰³⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Third Quarter Report: 1 January to 30 September 2020, October 2020, [url](#), p. 9; New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁰³⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Third Quarter Report: 1 January to 30 September 2020, October 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²⁰⁴⁰ Eurasia Review, Afghanistan: The Calculus of Violence – Analysis, 28 July 2020, [url](#)

employees of Da Afghanistan Bank (the central bank of Afghanistan), who were travelling in a car, and killed them a few hours later.²⁰⁴¹ In February 2021, AP mentioned that locals considered the road between two cities dangerous due to activities of criminal groups and the use of the road by the Taliban insurgents.²⁰⁴² The increase in insecurity was reported on Herat-Turghandi highway; in January 2021, Kabul Now reported on a kidnapping of passengers of a bus, who were soon released.²⁰⁴³ In February 2021, roads connecting Herat to Saghar district in Ghor province and Chaghcharan, provincial capital of Ghor, were reported closed to civilian and commercial use due to ongoing fighting.²⁰⁴⁴ All roads connecting Herat locations to Saghar district remained reportedly closed in the beginning of March 2021.²⁰⁴⁵

In October 2020, the Taliban reportedly damaged an electricity pylon in Ghoryan district, leaving almost half of the Herat's population without electricity.²⁰⁴⁶

According to ACLED data, the district of Herat, in which the provincial capital of Herat city is situated, witnessed the second-highest number of security incidents across the province. In the period between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021, ACLED recorded 55 security incidents in Herat district, almost 53 % of which were coded as 'battles,' 31 % as 'explosions/remote violence,' and 16 % as 'violence against civilians.'²⁰⁴⁷

The representative security incidents, which caused civilian casualties due to the use of IEDs in Herat city, comprise the following: in November 2020, at least three policemen were killed and two other persons, including a civilian, were injured in an IED explosion that was placed on a motorbike and detonated in a proximity of a police checkpoint;²⁰⁴⁸ in March 2021, at least one person was killed and at least 23 people injured, including 21 civilians, when 'an explosive-loaded vehicle detonated in PD14' of Herat city.²⁰⁴⁹

In late 2019 and early 2020, Herat city was reported to witness 'a series of security incidents, including targeted killings and attacks on the police.' However, as underlined by Reza Kazemi in April 2020, the city had 'mostly seen criminal and security incidents, certainly no large scale attacks or open fighting.'²⁰⁵⁰ Representative incidents of killings and targeted killings, which occurred in the city within the reporting period, are as follows: in April 2020, unknown gunmen killed a judge in the capital's Police District 12;²⁰⁵¹ in August 2020, unknown gunmen killed two women, who were travelling in a rickshaw in Hawoz Karbas area of Herat city²⁰⁵²; in October 2020, a tribal elder was killed by a gunman after he left a mosque close to his house²⁰⁵³; in November 2020, in the area of Babaji of the city, unknown gunmen killed a prosecutor for Herat province, when he was heading to his office;²⁰⁵⁴ in December 2020, a 45-year-old man was reportedly 'assassinated' by two gunmen on a public road in Herat city.²⁰⁵⁵

²⁰⁴¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, July 2020, [url](#), p. 12

²⁰⁴² AP, Fuel Tanker blast at Afghan-Iran border causes massive fire, 13 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁴³ Kabul Now, Taliban kidnap passengers in Herat, 2 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update, 15 – 21 February 2021, 21 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update, 22 – 28 February 2021, 28 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update, 1 – 7 March 2021, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 141

²⁰⁴⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Herat province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁸ Tolonews, Three Policemen killed in Herat Blast, 1 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁹ Ariana News, Heavy explosion rocks Herat, 12 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁰ Kazemi, R., Herat City's reported spike in insecurity: what a sobering of reading events reveals, AAN, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁵¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, updated 30 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁵² Tolonews, Two Women Killed by Unknown Gunmen in Herat City, 11 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁵³ Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on: 22 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁴ TKG, Prosecutor Killed in Afghanistan's Western Herat, 8 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁵ AVA, Man Assassinated in Herat City, 27 December 2020, [url](#)



As reported by Kazemi, journalists and civil society activists in Herat city described ‘the existence of complex rivalries among the provincial elites,’ partly manifesting itself in the competition ‘for influence in the police force.’ The relations between the local elites and the police were reported to ‘undermine the police’s ability to pursue and address crime and insecurity.’ Moreover, locals and journalists reportedly believed that some of the elites were involved in some of the security incidents, which the city witnessed in 2019 and the beginning of 2020, including targeted killings and attacks on the police.²⁰⁵⁶

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 31 December 2020, reporting 3 785 persons displaced from Herat, of which 3 755 were displaced within the province: from the districts of Adraskan, Farsi, Gulran, Kushk, Kushk-e Kohna, Obe, Pashtun Zarghun, and Shindand to Injil. During the same period, 30 persons were displaced to Ghor (from Chisht-e Sharif and Obe).²⁰⁵⁷ According to UNOCHA, 4 289 persons were displaced to Herat province in 2020, comprising 4 047 persons displaced to Injil, 144 to Karukh, 58 to Guzara, and 40 to Herat city.²⁰⁵⁸

Between 1 January 2021 and 31 March 2021, UNOCHA reported on 660 persons displaced within Herat province, comprising the displacements from Adraskan, Gulran, Kushk, Kushk-e Kohna, Obe, Pashtun Zarghun, and Shindand to Injil. During the same period, 150 persons were displaced from other provinces to Herat province, to Injil district.²⁰⁵⁹

In July 2020, DACAAR reported that the inhabitants of Pashtun Zarghun district were displaced to Herat city, due to fighting between ANDSF and the Taliban.²⁰⁶⁰ For the period between 5 September 2020 and 27 October 2020, DACAAR reported that the clashes between the ANDSF and the Taliban in Badghis and Herat provinces were causing displacement to Herat city;²⁰⁶¹ due to the fighting, inhabitants Daykundi and Helmand were reported to be displaced to Herat city in the period between 5 November 2020 and 7 January 2021.²⁰⁶² As reported by DACAAR, during 10 December 2020 and 6 February 2021, the displacement to Herat city was caused by the fighting between the ANDSF and the Taliban in Helmand, Ghor, and Herat provinces.²⁰⁶³

²⁰⁵⁶ Kazemi, R., Herat City’s reported spike in insecurity: what a sober of reading events reveals, AAN, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, 25 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁰ DACAAR, ERM Household Assessment Report, 26 July 2020, [url](#)

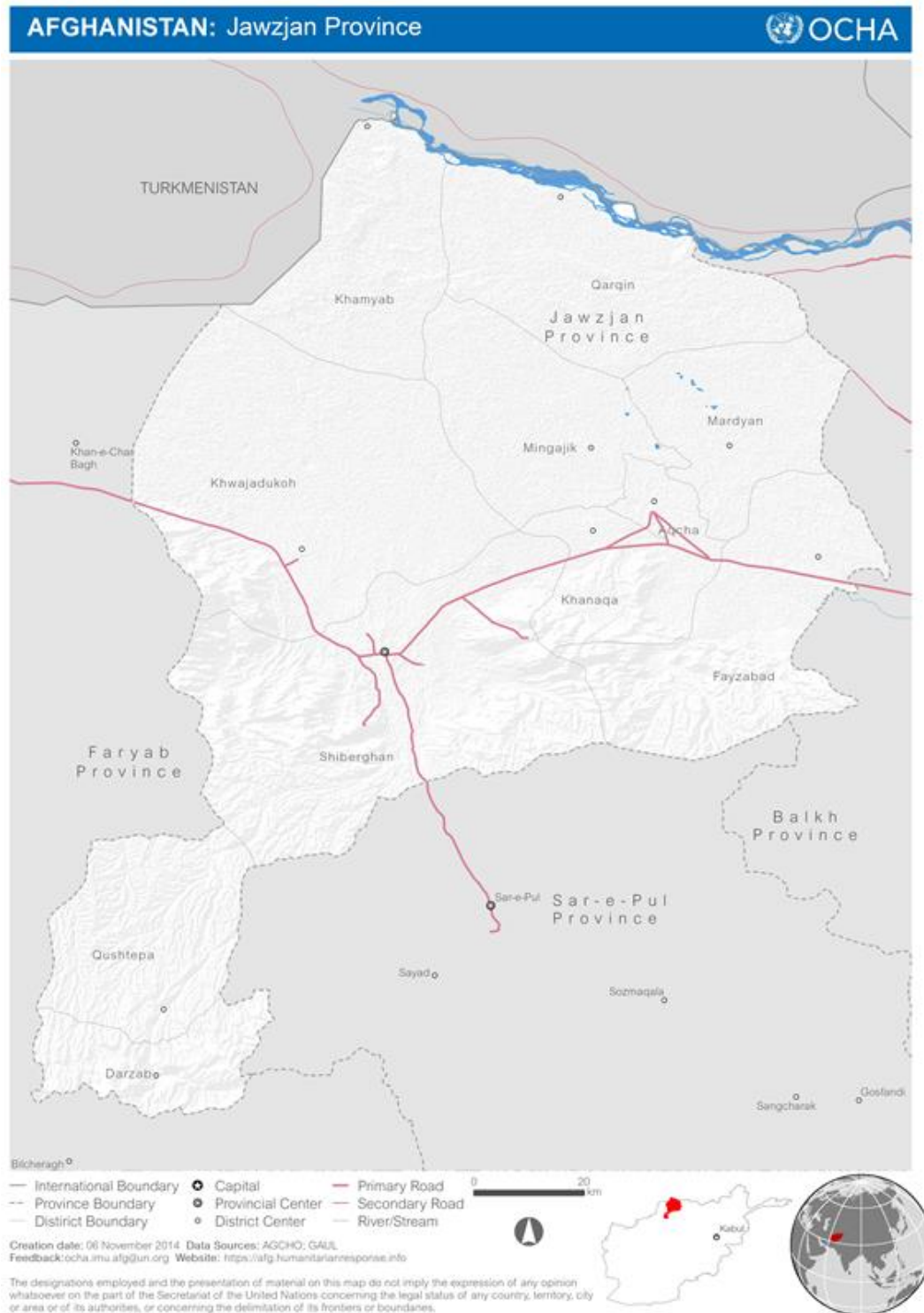
²⁰⁶¹ DACAAR, ERM 45 Household Assessment Report, 10 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁶² DACAAR, ERM, 15 Household Assessment Report, 20 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁶³ DACAAR, ERM 55 Household Assessment Report, 24 February 2021, [url](#)

2.14 Jawzjan

2.14.1 General description of the province



Map 14: Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, source: UNOCHA²⁰⁶⁴

²⁰⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 13

Jawzjan province is located in the northern part of Afghanistan and is divided into the following districts: Aqcha, Darzab, Fayzabad, Khamyab, Khanaqa, Khwajadukoh, Mardyan, Mingajik, Qarqin, Qushtepa and Shiberghan. The provincial capital is Shiberghan.²⁰⁶⁵ According to AAN, Darzab has been transferred from Faryab to Jawzjan because of security reasons. Later, the district of Qushtepa was carved out of Darzab.²⁰⁶⁶

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 590 866, 188 808 of whom live in the provincial capital, Shiberghan.²⁰⁶⁷

The main ethnic groups in the province are Uzbeks and Turkmen. Other groups present include Pashtuns and so-called Arabs – i.e. descendants of migrants who left the Arabian Peninsula in the 14th century –, as well as some Tajiks and Kuchi nomads, whose numbers vary depending on the season.²⁰⁶⁸

The Ring Road connects the provincial capital of Jawzjan with Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh to the east (crossing Khanaqa and Fayzabad districts) and Faryab to the west (crossing Khwajadukoh district). Another main road connects neighbouring Sar-e Pul to the Ring Road in Shiberghan.²⁰⁶⁹ According to UNOCHA, the road between Mazar-e Sharif and provincial capital Shiberghan remained contested in January 2020.²⁰⁷⁰ AGEs had control and were taxing commercial and logistic vehicles.²⁰⁷¹ Shiberghan airport is a small airport in Jawzjan,²⁰⁷² however no information on its services was available.

2.14.2 Conflict background and actors in Jawzjan

Despite being home to the former powerful Uzbek militia leader Abdul Rashid Dostum and in spite of the presence of his 'former militia fighters', insurgent activity reportedly increased in Jawzjan after NATO-led forces handed over control to Afghan security forces in 2012.²⁰⁷³ A 2017 study on Islamic State (IS) presence in Afghanistan found that 'there are enormous numbers of armed forces in [...] Jawzjan [...], among which the irregular (arbaki, private paramilitary units of commanders) and anti-government forces (mostly various local Taliban groups) clearly outnumber the ANSF (ANA, ANP and ALP) and National Uprising units.'²⁰⁷⁴

AAN reported that conflict emerged between local Taliban commanders and the Taliban leadership in 2014 after the latter tried to enhance the accountability of the commanders in operations. According to AAN, the appearance of IMU in Qushtepa subsequently favoured the formation of an 'Islamic State (IS)' faction in the district.²⁰⁷⁵

²⁰⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Northern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#), pp. 34-45; Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 38

²⁰⁶⁶ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁷ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 34

²⁰⁶⁸ Larsson, K., A Provincial Survey of Balkh, Jowzjan, Samangan and Saripul, Sida, November 2008, [url](#), p. 28

²⁰⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014, [url](#), p. 34; LCA, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 2;

UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 January – 26 January 2020, 29 January 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰⁷¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 2; Payk Fact-Check, Security Situation In The Northern Highways Of The Country Have Gotten Worse, Instead Of Getting Better, 9 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁷² MSF, Afghanistan Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#), p. 3; Afghanistan, ACAA, All airports, 24 September 2017, [url](#)

²⁰⁷³ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁴ Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, BICC/TLO, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 28-29

²⁰⁷⁵ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

IMU, which appeared to have started infiltrating Jawzjan in early 2015 from neighbouring Faryab province according to RFE/RL,²⁰⁷⁶ has been a former ally of the Taliban, but shifted allegiance towards IS after the disclosure of Taliban leader Mullah Omar's death in 2015.²⁰⁷⁷ Most of the IMU fighters in some of Afghanistan's provinces, including Jawzjan, returned to the Taliban not much later.²⁰⁷⁸

The presence of IMU in Jawzjan reportedly provided former Taliban shadow district governor of Darzab district, Qari Hekmat,²⁰⁷⁹ who had been removed earlier from the Taliban's ranks after a conflict, and his followers, with an opportunity to pledge allegiance to IS in 2015. Subsequently, Hekmat succeeded in shaping his former Taliban unit into an independent IS-associated group. According to AAN, Hekmat's shift to 'IS' was rather driven by '[...] power-saving opportunism [...]' than by ideological motives.²⁰⁸⁰ The self-proclaimed IS group managed to hold control over 'an enclave' or 'an island' in the districts of Qushtepa and Darzab for three years, fighting the Taliban²⁰⁸¹ – though not expanding its territory due to the widespread Taliban presence in the province²⁰⁸² – and initially outlasting the death of its founder by a US drone strike in April 2018.²⁰⁸³ In August 2018, the Taliban overran the group's strongholds,²⁰⁸⁴ prompting a faction of Hekmat's former unit to surrender to the government forces in fear of retaliation by the Taliban, while others (reportedly mainly Central Asian fighters) surrendered to the Taliban.²⁰⁸⁵

While Afghanistan analyst Obaid Ali wrote in 2017, that he had found no reliable evidence of a connection between Hekmat's IS group and Nangarhar's Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), which was recognised by the 'Daesh central' in Syria and Iraq (i.e. the main franchise) as an IS branch,²⁰⁸⁶ a finding that was supported in a 2017 study on IS presence in Afghanistan,²⁰⁸⁷ the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reported, after the investigation following the surrender in the Summer of 2018, that 'it appears that the ISIL branch in Jawzjan was directly and regularly in touch with ISIL in Nangarhar and received all communications through them.'²⁰⁸⁸ No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Jawzjan province between January 2020 and 28 February 2021.²⁰⁸⁹

²⁰⁷⁶ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁷ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#); Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, AAN, 24 November 2015, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁸ Modern Diplomacy, UN Security Council: Taliban continues to patronize Central Asian Jihadists, 6 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁹ Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island: A Daesh enclave in Jawzjan?, AAN, 11 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁰ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

²⁰⁸¹ Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island: A Daesh enclave in Jawzjan?, AAN, 11 November 2018, [url](#); Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat's IS-affiliated 'island' survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018, [url](#); Der Spiegel, Afghanistan 120 Tote bei Kämpfen zwischen Taliban und IS [Afghanistan: 120 Dead in Clashes Between Taliban and IS], 19 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁸² Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

²⁰⁸³ Ali, O., Still under the IS's Black Flag: Qari Hekmat's ISKP island in Jawzjan after his death by drone, AAN, 15 May 2018, [url](#); UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 13 June 2019, [url](#), para 53

²⁰⁸⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 85

²⁰⁸⁵ Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island Overrun: Taleban defeat 'ISKP' in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, [url](#); UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 13 June 2019, [url](#), para 53

²⁰⁸⁶ Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island Overrun: Taleban defeat 'ISKP' in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁷ Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, BICC/TLO, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 28-29

²⁰⁸⁸ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 13 June 2019, [url](#), para 54

²⁰⁸⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

AAN reported in 2017 that the Taliban became increasingly successful in Jawzjan, setting up administrative and military institutions, after opening their ranks to non-Pashtun fighters. The recruitment of Uzbeks allegedly proved particularly successful in the province.²⁰⁹⁰ Subsequently, the Taliban were able to expand their control in Jawzjan,²⁰⁹¹ reportedly pushing into the province's northern and eastern parts, as well as the strategic areas around the provincial centre.²⁰⁹² In August 2019 provincial police officials stated that 1 500 fighters, forming 123 groups, have been involved in fighting against government forces under the Taliban leadership in Jawzjan province.²⁰⁹³ The Taliban took control of Darzab district on 31 December 2019.²⁰⁹⁴ The Afghan security forces reportedly withdrew peacefully from their Antan Hill military base on demand of the local residents.²⁰⁹⁵ Despite official claims that government forces had retaken Khamyab and Qarqin districts in April 2020,²⁰⁹⁶ in its assessment, presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 12 March 2021, LWJ continued to indicate Khamyab as 'Taliban-controlled'. The LWJ further assessed Darzab and Qushtepa districts also as 'Taliban-controlled', Mardyan, Mingajik and Shiberghan districts as 'government-controlled' and the remaining districts in Jawzjan province as 'contested'. More recently, as of 26 of May 2021, Mardyan and Mingajik districts shifted to 'contested'.²⁰⁹⁷ A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021²⁰⁹⁸ designated 58.64 % of Jawzjan's territory under Taliban control, with only Darzab ('Zarab') district, including the district centre, entirely under Taliban control and 41.36 % under government control. According to the same survey, 353 039 of Jawzjan's inhabitants lived in areas under Taliban control and 249 043 of the province's population lived in areas under government control.²⁰⁹⁹

According to information available to the UN Security Council in 2020, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) operated mainly in Faryab and Jawzjan provinces where it maintained links to splinter groups such as Islamic Jihad Group and Khatiba Imama al-Bukhari.²¹⁰⁰ In 2019, IMU was reported to have no more than 100 members, overall in Afghanistan.²¹⁰¹ In its January 2021 report,

²⁰⁹⁰ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

²⁰⁹¹ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#); Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

²⁰⁹² Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island Overrun: Taleban defeat 'ISKP' in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, '123 groups fight government forces under Taliban leadership in Jawzjan', 3 August 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Jawzjan Security Needs More Attention: Official, 5 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁹⁴ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/753–S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), para 23

²⁰⁹⁵ Khaama Press, Taliban takes over Darzab district of northern Jawzjan province, 31 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁹⁶ Khaama Press, 25 Taliban militants killed, 17 wounded in the operation 'Retake of Khamaab', 12 April 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Security forces purge Jawzjan's Khomaab district, kill 25 Taliban rebels, 12 April 2020, [url](#); 1TV, Afghan forces retake Jowzjan's Khumab district, kill 14 Taliban militants, 19 April 2020, [url](#); USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 2, 18; Salaam Times, Residents return home after Afghan forces clear Taliban from Jawzjan districts, 23 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁹⁷ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated. For more information on the methodology used by, see the Introduction section of this report.

²⁰⁹⁸ Through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires, Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed a total of 1 266 respondents for this survey, randomly selected across the country. Pajhwok acknowledges the complexity of this task and the possible inaccuracy of the provided information.

²⁰⁹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁰ UN Security Council, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para 85

²¹⁰¹ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 13 June 2019, [url](#), para 72

the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team did not mention the presence of members of the Central Asian groups in Jawzjan.²¹⁰²

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Jawzjan province decreased by 16 %.²¹⁰³

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Jawzjan province was under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps and included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North was led by German forces and had its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.²¹⁰⁴

2.14.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 120 civilian casualties (47 deaths and 73 injured) in Jawzjan. While this represents an overall decrease of 2 % compared to 2019, the number of civilian deaths increased by 63 %.²¹⁰⁵ Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by non-suicide IEDs and UXO/Landmines.²¹⁰⁶ Resolute Support (RS) recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Jawzjan in the first half of 2020, reporting a decrease in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.²¹⁰⁷ RS data on civilian casualties per province for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.²¹⁰⁸

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, sources consulted by ACLED reported 151 violent events in Jawzjan province, of which 106 were coded as 'battles', 39 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 6 as 'violence against civilians'.²¹⁰⁹

²¹⁰² UN Security Council, Twenty-Seventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities, 3 February 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁰³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²¹⁰⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12, p. 50; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

²¹⁰⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94.

²¹⁰⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

²¹⁰⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

²¹⁰⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

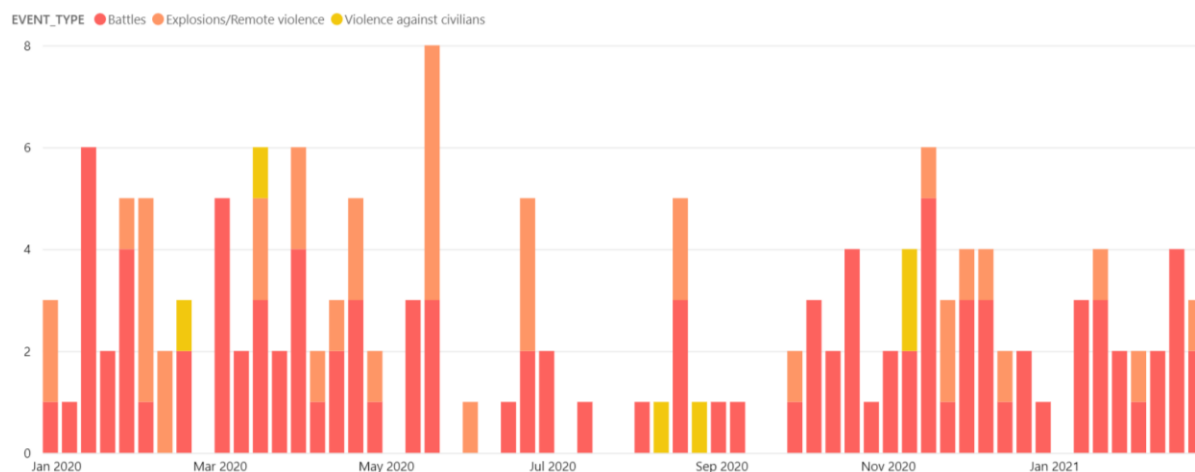


Figure 28: Jawzjan province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²¹¹⁰

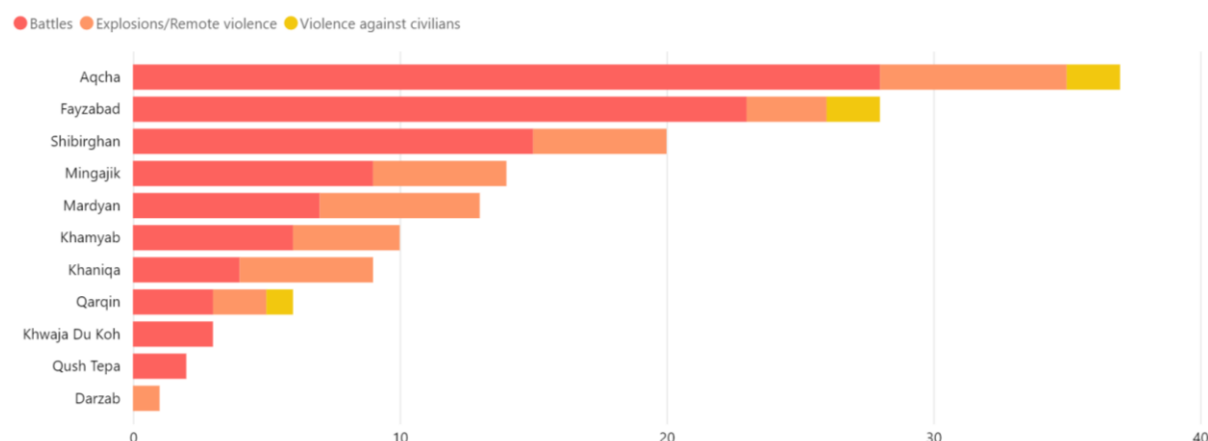


Figure 29: Jawzjan province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²¹¹¹

The battles concerned mostly armed clashes.²¹¹² The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS personnel, and members of pro-government militias or local uprising forces²¹¹³ or attacks on their facilities such as checkpoints²¹¹⁴

²¹¹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹¹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 8 events (6 battles, 1 remote violence and 1 violence against incidents) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

²¹¹² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹¹³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#)

²¹¹⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 policemen killed, 8 wounded in Jawzjan firefight, 28 January 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghans Say Taliban Attacks Kill At Least 17 Military Personnel In Northern Provinces, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

and military bases²¹¹⁵ or clashes between ANDSF or local uprising forces and AGEs.²¹¹⁶ At times such incidents resulted in civilian casualties,²¹¹⁷ as for example in a Taliban attack in Aqcha district in May 2020.²¹¹⁸

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, as for example in Mangajik in January 2020,²¹¹⁹ were also registered under 'armed clashes' by ACLED.²¹²⁰

'Air/drone strikes' made up 12 % of all violent incidents recorded by ACLED in Jawzjan between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021,²¹²¹ all carried out by Afghan forces.²¹²² While air strikes targeted and inflicted losses among AGEs,²¹²³ in an incident on 20 May 2020, six civilians were also killed when Afghan forces bombed houses in response to a Taliban attack in Mardyan district.²¹²⁴ The Taliban also reported civilian casualties as a result of air strikes by the Afghan forces in April 2020 in Aqcha and Khamyab districts.²¹²⁵

AGEs also used roadside bombs or IEDs to target security forces.²¹²⁶ Such incidents represented 8 % of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Jawzjan in the reporting period.²¹²⁷ Sometimes they caused casualties among civilians, as happened on 24 June 2020 when six civilians were killed and one more was injured when their vehicle was hit by a landmine in Mardyan district²¹²⁸ or on 22 August 2020 when three employees of a government-run gas company were killed in a roadside bomb explosion in Shiberghan district.²¹²⁹

Six incidents categorised by ACLED as 'violence against civilians'²¹³⁰ included the killing of a tribal elder by a pro-government militia in Aqcha district in February 2020²¹³¹, the wounding of a civilian at a wedding in Qarqin district in March 2020²¹³² and the killing of a shepherd in August 2020 by Afghan military forces, all reported by the Taliban²¹³³ as well as the killing of two civilians at a clinic in Aqcha

²¹¹⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#)

²¹¹⁶ RiV Monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 27 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban killed, 11 injured in Jawzjan clashes, 19 August 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 killed, 6 wounded in Jawzjan firefight, 26 December 2020, [url](#)

²¹¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 – 20 September 2020), 23 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²¹¹⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²¹¹⁹ TKG, Casualties Left to More Than 30 Taliban in Balkh, Jawzjan, 26 January 2020, [url](#)

²¹²⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹²¹ These do not include air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under 'battles'. For more information on ACLED's methodology, please consult the introduction.

²¹²² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹²³ Ariana News, 43 Taliban militants killed in Balkh, Jawzjan operations: MoD, 10 February 2020, [url](#)

²¹²⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020 (revised on 10 August 2020, [url](#), p. 16; New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²¹²⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹²⁶ RiV-Monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 30 November 2020, [url](#)

²¹²⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹²⁸ Tolonews, 6 civilians killed in Jawzjan landmine explosion, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

²¹²⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); RiV-Monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 23 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹³⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹³¹ Voice of Jihad, Tribal elder martyred, another one injured in enemy aggression, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

²¹³² Voice of Jihad, 4 civilians martyred, 1 injured in country's north, 23 March 2020, [url](#)

²¹³³ The killing of the shepherd was registered by ACLED as reported by the Taliban, but the original source could not be found.

district by unknown armed men in August 2020.²¹³⁴ The killing of three civilians including the head of the district development council during or after prayers in Fayzabad district November 2020 seemed to be entered twice in the ACLED database, possibly due to conflicting reporting, as some sources attributed this killing to the Taliban,²¹³⁵ while the Taliban claimed the Afghan Forces were responsible.²¹³⁶

Security incidents along the Balkh-Jawzjan Highway occurred in February,²¹³⁷ July,²¹³⁸ August²¹³⁹ and October 2020²¹⁴⁰ as well as on the highway connecting Sar-e Pul to Jawzjan in February, March, June, July and November 2020.²¹⁴¹ Continuing conflict was reported on these roads in December 2020.²¹⁴² Without further specifying which provinces or districts were impacted, UNOCHA observed how civilian movements along main roads and roads between provincial capital and district centres were interrupted and humanitarian activities were obstructed in the northern region of Afghanistan due to clashes and illegal checkpoints in September 2020²¹⁴³ as well as in January and February 2021.²¹⁴⁴ Despite reassurances and promises by the Afghan security forces about improving the security on the northern highways, the situation worsened in the last quarter of 2020. Passengers complained about increasing insecurity, the presence of Taliban checkpoints, extortion and threats by the Taliban or other armed men.²¹⁴⁵ The New York Times reported in February 2021 that the highways in the north, which are vital as they offer the limited options of traveling between provinces by road, 'have increasingly become the front line for an emboldened Taliban insurgency'.²¹⁴⁶ Reports of disrupted freedom of movement and extortion of villagers and drivers along the Mazar-Shiberghan highway by the Taliban in Fayzabad prompted Afghan forces to conduct an operation in that district in November 2020.²¹⁴⁷

The WHO did not register any attacks related to health care provision in Jawzjan province in 2020.²¹⁴⁸ However, in July 2020, the WHO expressed concern about the potential disruption on timely assessment and response in some of the northern provinces, including Jawzjan due to the security threat on the Mazar-Shiberghan-Faryab highway.²¹⁴⁹

²¹³⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); RiV-Monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 25 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹³⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 individuals gunned down in Jawzjan, 11 November 2020, [url](#)

²¹³⁶ Voice of Jihad, War Crimes (November 2020, [url](#))

²¹³⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (17 February – 23 February 2020), 26 February 2020, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (24 February – 1 March 2020, 4 March 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²¹³⁸ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch, 3 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹³⁹ RiV-Monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 29 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁰ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch, 18 October 2020, [url](#); RiV-Monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 22 October 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴¹ Xinhua, 13 killed in N. Afghanistan clashes, including pro-gov't local leader, 4 February 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 uprising members killed in Jawzjan clashes, 3 March 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban militants suffer heavy casualties in Jawzjan province, 30 June 2020, [url](#); RiV-Monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 27 November 2020, [url](#); MENAFN, Afghanistan- Taliban militants suffer heavy casualties in Jawzjan province, 3 July 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 – 13 December 2020), 16 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²¹⁴³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 – 20 September 2020), 23 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²¹⁴⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 – 10 January 2021), 13 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (11 – 17 January 2021), 19 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 – 24 January 2021), 27 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²¹⁴⁵ Afghanistan Times, Passengers, drivers affected by security situation in north, 21 October 2020, [url](#); Payk Fact-Check, Security Situation In The Northern Highways Of The Country Have Gotten Worse, Instead Of Getting Better, 9 December 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁶ New York Times (The), Inside the Shadowy Militias Luring Unsuspecting Afghans to Fight, or Die, 4 February 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁷ Xinhua, 6 militants killed during operation in N. province, 23 November 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁸ WHO, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (January 01 - December 31, 2020, 11 January 2021, [url](#))

²¹⁴⁹ WHO, Situation Report. Afghanistan. Emergency Type: protracted emergency, July 2020, [url](#)

In August 2020 gas supply from Shiberghan to the electric fertilizer factory in Mazar-e Sharif was cut off after the Taliban had blown up a gas pipeline in Aqcha district.²¹⁵⁰

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 13 328 persons displaced from Jawzjan, of which 12 278 (92 %) were displaced within the province. During the same period, 16 625 persons were displaced to Jawzjan.²¹⁵¹

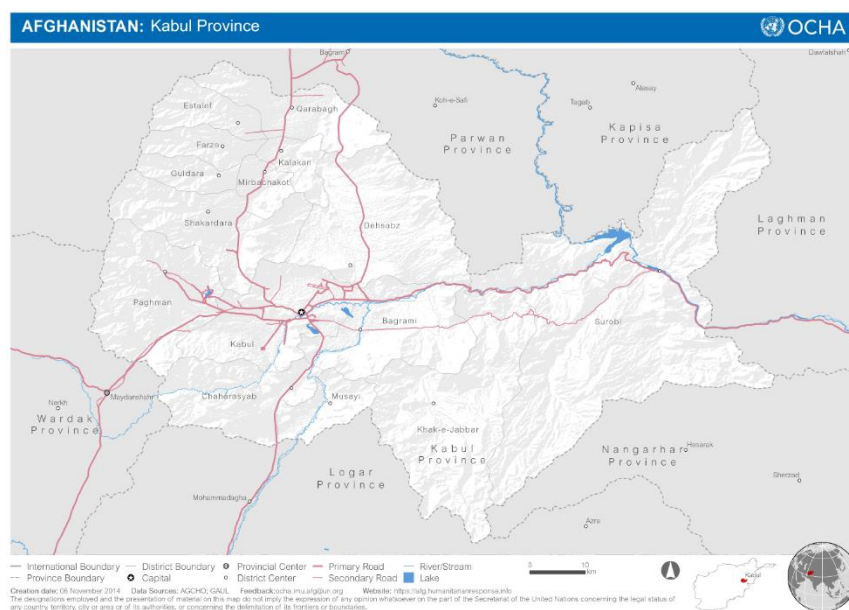
Over half of all registered IDPs from Jawzjan originated from Mardyan and Darzab districts. No displacement was registered from Khwajadukoh and Qarqin districts.²¹⁵² UNOCHA reported how fighting caused displacement in Jawzjan in May 2020, in particular from Mingajik districts as a result of armed clashes between AGEs and the ANDSF.²¹⁵³

A few hundred IDPs were displaced within Shiberghan district in late August and early November 2020.

Shiberghan district hosted 81 % of all IDPs to Jawzjan. In addition to the people displaced within Jawzjan province, Shiberghan district also hosted IDPs from different districts in Faryab and Sar-e Pul provinces.²¹⁵⁴

2.15 Kabul province

2.15.1 General description of the province



Map 15: Afghanistan - Kabul province, source: UNOCHA²¹⁵⁵

²¹⁵⁰ Riv Monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 26 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁵¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁵² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁵³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 May – 31 May 2020, 3 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²¹⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial Reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 14

Kabul province is located in the central region of Afghanistan and is divided into the following districts: Bagrami, Chaharasyab, Dehsabz, Estalef, Farza, Guldara, Kabul, Kalakan, Khak-e Jabbar, Mirbachakot, Musayi, Paghman, Qarabagh, Shakardara and Surobi. The provincial capital is Kabul City, the capital of Afghanistan.²¹⁵⁶ More than half of the province consists of mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain.²¹⁵⁷ North of Kabul City lies the Shomali plain, a plateau stretching from the outskirts of the city to the Salang Pass. According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, the Shomali area has been a central part of Afghan economy and politics in the last couple of centuries, featuring strong political-armed networks dating back to the *mujahideen* time.²¹⁵⁸

According to estimates for 2019-20 by NSIA, Kabul province has a population of 5 029 850.²¹⁵⁹ Kabul province has the largest share of population of any province, an estimated 16 % of the national total.²¹⁶⁰

AAN describes Kabul province as the most ethnically diverse of all provinces.²¹⁶¹ The main ethnic groups in Kabul are Tajik, Pashtun and Hazara.²¹⁶² Other groups present include Uzbek, Turkmen and Baloch. The majority of the population of Kabul province are Sunni Muslims, but there are also Shias, Sikhs and Hindus.²¹⁶³

Major roads depart from Kabul and connect the Afghan capital with the rest of the country. The main highway to Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province passes through the districts of Shakardara, Mirbachakot, Kalakan and Qarabagh. Another primary road connects Kabul City with Bagram in Parwan province and passes through Dehsabz and Qarabagh districts. The Kabul-Jalalabad Highway leads to Nangarhar province through the districts of Bagrami, Khak-e Jabbar and Surobi. The Kabul-Kandahar Highway connects Kabul to Wardak province through Paghman district in the south-west of the province. Another primary road passes through Bagrami and Chaharasyab districts in the south and connects Kabul City with Logar province.²¹⁶⁴ Kabul City hosts Hamid Karzai Airport, served by international and domestic scheduled passenger flights.²¹⁶⁵

2.15.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul province

As reported by AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini in 2015, the government's control over the Uzbini Valley in Surobi, the easternmost district of Kabul province,²¹⁶⁶ had decreased and members of Hezb-e Islami, which has historically been the stronger group in the area, as well as the Taliban, were reported present in the district. The Uzbini Valley has been serving as a relatively easily traversable connection to the insecure neighbouring districts of Tagab in Kapisa province and Bad Pakh in Laghman province. According to Foschini, this broader region is 'an important crossing point and sanctuary for insurgents moving deeper into Afghanistan from the border area [with Pakistan]'.²¹⁶⁷ According to a November 2018 article from UNAMA, Surobi district has witnessed several community conflicts. The Surobi local council head described 'the major causes of conflict in

²¹⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Kabul Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, November 2019, [url](#), p. 4

²¹⁵⁷ WFP, Provincial Profile: Kabul, n.d., [url](#)

²¹⁵⁸ Foschini, F., Elections 2014 (6): Two Types of Security in the Shomali, AAN, 7 April 2014, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 4

²¹⁶⁰ Warden, S., Past as Prologue? What the Parliamentary Election Results Tell Us About the September Presidential Election, AAN, 23 August 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁶¹ Warden, S., Past as Prologue? What the Parliamentary Election Results Tell Us About the September Presidential Election, AAN, 23 August 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁶² US Naval Postgraduate School, Kabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²¹⁶³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Kabul Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

²¹⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Kabul Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²¹⁶⁵ CAPA - Centre for Aviation, Kabul Hamid Karzai International Airport, n.d., [url](#)

²¹⁶⁶ Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁶⁷ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing Some of Afghanistan's Most Notorious Hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url](#)

the district' as 'underdevelopment and poverty'.²¹⁶⁸ In February 2020, UNOCHA reported on an increasingly volatile situation in Surobi district, due to a rising number of militant attacks on ANDSF positions.²¹⁶⁹ According to AAN analysts Ruttig and Sabawoon, Surobi district (where fighting reportedly increased recently) together with neighbouring provinces such as Logar, Wardak and western Nangarhar are 'part of a belt that could cut off the capital from southern and eastern Afghanistan', if the security situation would escalate.²¹⁷⁰

An increased activity of non-state armed groups was reported in several provinces in the summer of 2020, including in areas in Kabul previously considered as safe, according to UNOCHA.²¹⁷¹

In May 2020, the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reported to the UN Security Council on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made, including in Kabul province.²¹⁷² An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 12 March 2021, indicated all Kabul's districts as 'government-controlled' or 'undetermined'. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Chaharasyab, Paghman, Dehsabz, Musayi, Kalakan, Guldara, Shakardara, Qarabagh and Surobi districts shifted to 'contested'.²¹⁷³ As confirmed by SIGAR in April 2020 and by USDOD in June 2020 and December 2020, the capital, Kabul City, has remained under the control of the Afghan government.²¹⁷⁴ A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021²¹⁷⁵ designated 91.20 % of Kabul's territory under government control, 7.33 % under Taliban control and 1.47 % controlled by neither side. According to the same survey, 5 136 897 of Kabul's inhabitants live in areas under government control, 56 475 of the province's population live in areas under Taliban control and 11 295 of Kabul's residents live in areas controlled by neither side.²¹⁷⁶

As reported by the New York Times in August 2020, the Taliban have long had a quiet presence in the southern and south-eastern districts of Kabul, particularly targeting government vehicles in Surobi district. In 2020, the militants reportedly displayed a more open presence in the district, frequently forcing families to cut ties with the Afghan government and providing food and financial support to the insurgency group. An increased Taliban presence in the districts north of Kabul City has equally been reported in 2020, forcing government employees to relocate their families. ANDSF operations have only temporarily been able to dismantle Taliban positions in these areas, with the militants reinforcing when government forces were distracted by other priorities. Residents from Shakardara district declared to the New York Times how a small group of men, gathered by a former ANA soldier, proclaiming themselves as Taliban, had easily established a foothold in the district and had carried

²¹⁶⁸ UNAMA, Kabul Elders Call for Participation of Afghans in Peacefully Resolving Community Conflict, 15 November 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January - 2 February 2020), 3 February 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²¹⁷⁰ Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁷¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 - 19 July 2020), 23 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²¹⁷² UN SECURITY COUNCIL, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9

²¹⁷³ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.)

²¹⁷⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 66; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 2, 18; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 33

²¹⁷⁵ Through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires, Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed a total of 1 266 respondents for this survey, randomly selected across the country. Pajhwok acknowledges the complexity of this task and the possible inaccuracy of the provided information.

²¹⁷⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

out an attack on a government official.²¹⁷⁷ According to an AAN report, also published in August 2020, there is no active Taliban presence in Shakardara district.²¹⁷⁸

In May 2020, a Taliban commander known as Mullah Jan was injured, when a mortar, which he was reportedly attempting to launch on a security forces' base in the Uzbin Valley of Surobi district, went off prematurely.²¹⁷⁹ In September 2020, the deputy commander of the Taliban's Red Unit, known as Ghairatullah or Mullah Sangeen, was killed in an ANDSF operation in Surobi.²¹⁸⁰ In July 2020, increasing (though still small-scale) Taliban activity was reported in Paghman,²¹⁸¹ for example in several villages of the Arghandi area in the district.²¹⁸² According to local residents, cited by Tolonews, well-armed Taliban militants were launching attacks on security checkpoints, planting IEDs and extorting people. NDS officials, cited in the same Tolonews article, confirmed two prominent Taliban commanders were operating in the area between Arghandi and the Kohna Kumar Valley in Wardak province.²¹⁸³ In October and December 2020, several Taliban militants, reportedly responsible for various targeted killings and IED attacks against the Afghan security forces in Kabul, were arrested and killed during operations in Paghman district.²¹⁸⁴ In August 2020, the Taliban's presence was reported in Qarabagh district.²¹⁸⁵ Two of the group's militants, reportedly involved in targeted assassinations of government employees in Qarabagh, were arrested by a police special operations unit in November 2020.²¹⁸⁶ In August 2020, dozens of families reportedly left their homes in Shakardara and Guldara districts, following a surge in security threats and intensifying Taliban activity. Shortly after the Taliban were pushed back from Shakardara district in a large-scale ANDSF operation, clashes were reported in Guldara district.²¹⁸⁷ During the operation, a Taliban unit leader known as Mullah Akhtar was arrested in Shakardara.²¹⁸⁸

While ISKP represents a diminished threat since receiving a significant setback in late 2019 in what had been its Afghan headquarters in Nangarhar province,²¹⁸⁹ the group has remained active, ambitious and threatening, according to a UN Security Council report from February 2020.²¹⁹⁰ Grounds for concern have been added that ISKP groups might have relocated to Kunar and Kabul provinces, raising the potential for a resurgence.²¹⁹¹ According to a March 2021 AAN dispatch, no

²¹⁷⁷ New York Times (The), With Delay in Afghan Peace Talks, a Creeping Sense of 'Siege' Around Kabul, 23 August 2020, updated 22 September 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁷⁸ Clark, K. et al., Afghanistan's Newest Local Defence Force: Were "All the Mistakes of the ALP" Turned into ANA-TF Safeguards?, AAN, August 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 25

²¹⁷⁹ Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Loses Both Legs in Premature Mortar Round Explosion in Kabul, 4 May 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁰ Tolonews, Key Taliban Commander Killed in Afghan Forces Operation, 17 September 2020, edited 18 September 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸¹ Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸² Tolonews, Residents West of Kabul City Report Rise in Taliban Activity, 15 July 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸³ Tolonews, Residents West of Kabul City Report Rise in Taliban Activity, 15 July 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Commander Killed in Kabul Operation, 10 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Target Killers, Bomb Planters Arrested in Kabul, 1 December 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Qarabagh District Chief Survives Armed Attack, Security Guard Killed, 20 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁶ Khaama Press, Police Busted Two over Target Killings and Assassinations: Kabul, 28 November 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁷ Tolonews, Dozens Flee Homes as Taliban Increases Presence North of Kabul, 21 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁸ Tolonews, Taliban Unit Leader Arrested in Kabul Operation, 23 August 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Key Taliban Member Arrested in a Joint Military Operation in Kabul, 23 August 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁹ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the Recent Victory Against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#); USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 8

²¹⁹⁰ UN Security Council, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2020/95, 4 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7

²¹⁹¹ UN Security Council, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2020/95, 4 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7; Washington Post (The), Afghanistan Claims the Islamic State Was 'Obliterated'. But Fighters Who Got Away Could Stage a Resurgence, 9 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 37

open ISKP presence is left in Kunar, or elsewhere in Afghanistan, but a small underground presence remains.²¹⁹² Between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021, ACLED recorded one incident specifically attributed to ISKP in Kabul province, outside of Kabul district (for information on the presence of ISKP in the capital region, see the chapter on Kabul City). In February 2020, ISKP reportedly fired missiles on a US military base in Bagrami district.²¹⁹³ Information on civilian casualties reported during this incident was not found among the sources consulted. In May 2020, various ISKP and Haqqani Network hideouts in the capital (see chapter on Kabul City) as well as in Shakardara district were raided during an operation by NDS special units. Several members of the militant groups, including a regional ISKP leader,²¹⁹⁴ were reportedly arrested and killed.²¹⁹⁵

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Kabul province increased by 44 %.²¹⁹⁶

In terms of the presence of government security forces, the main part of Kabul province was reported to be under the responsibility of the Train, Advise and Assist Command - Capital (TAAC-C), part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-C is led by Turkish forces. The district of Surobi was reported to be under the responsibility of the 201st ANA corps.²¹⁹⁷ The Special Mission Wing (SMW), an ANDSF unit established in 2012, has several assault squadrons in Kabul to support counterterrorism and counternarcotic missions conducted by Afghan Special Forces. The unit also has an imagery, surveillance and reconnaissance squadron in Kabul.²¹⁹⁸ NDS unit 01 is reported to operate in the central region, including in Kabul province. This paramilitary CIA-backed militia has been allegedly accused of human rights abuses, such as involvement in extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and attacks on medical facilities.²¹⁹⁹

2.15.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 817 civilian casualties (255 deaths and 526 injured) in Kabul province. This represents a decrease of 48 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were targeted killings, followed by non-suicide IEDs and suicide attacks.²²⁰⁰ Resolute Support (RS) recorded the highest countrywide number of civilian casualties (208) in Kabul province in the first quarter of 2020, representing the most substantial countrywide increase (151 %) compared to the last quarter of 2019.²²⁰¹ In the second quarter of 2020, RS indicated Kabul as one out of three provinces, together with Nangarhar and Ghazni, that experienced the highest number of civilian casualties countrywide,

²¹⁹² Ali, O. and Gharani, K., Hit from Many Sides (2): The Demise of ISKP in Kunar, AAN, 2 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁹³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁴ RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Capture Key Figures From Islamic State's South Asia Branch, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁵ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Raid Daesh Hideout North of Kabul, 6 May 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, 5 killed As Special Forces Bust Major Network Led by ISIS, Haqqani Network in Kabul, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁶ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²¹⁹⁷ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

²¹⁹⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 75; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 122; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#), p. 134

²¹⁹⁹ HRW, "They've Shot Many Like This" Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Clark, K., CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitaries Accused of Grave Abuses: New Human Rights Watch Report, AAN, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

²²⁰¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 69-70

with an average of 204 civilian casualties each.²²⁰² RS data on civilian casualties per province for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.²²⁰³

ACLED collected data on 347 violent events in Kabul province from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021 from reports in open sources, of which 138 were coded as 'battles', 151 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 58 as 'violence against civilians'.²²⁰⁴

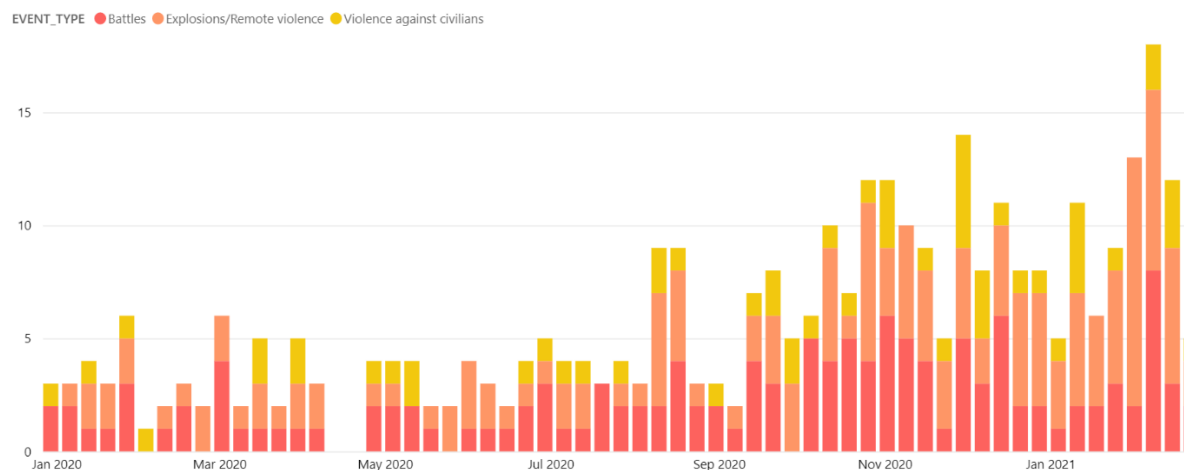


Figure 30: Kabul province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²²⁰⁵

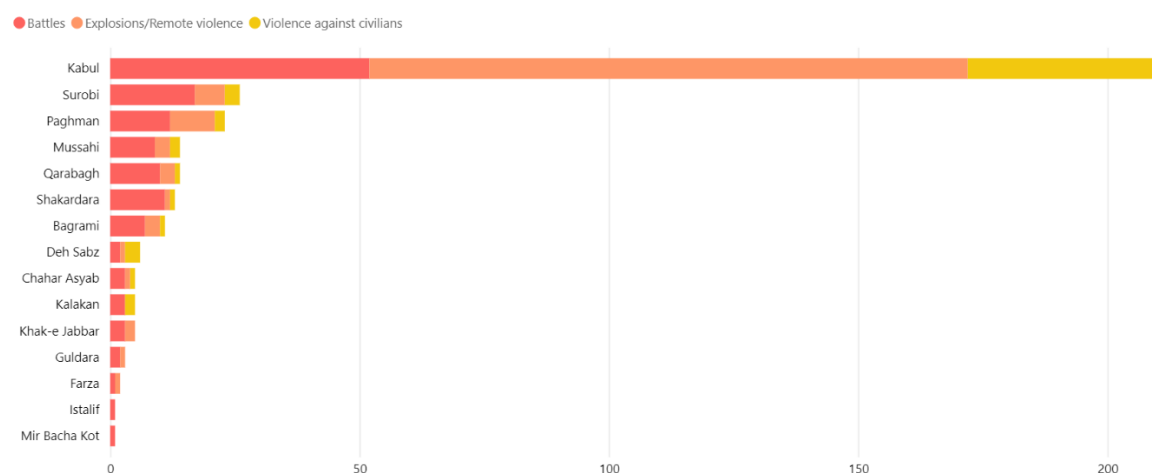


Figure 31: Kabul province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²²⁰⁶

ACLED recorded around 40 % of the violent incidents in Kabul province as 'battles', nearly all of which were coded as 'armed clashes'. The majority of the armed clashes in Kabul province were

²²⁰² SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 71-72

²²⁰³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

²²⁰⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²²⁰⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²²⁰⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 7 incidents (4 battles and 3 violence against civilians) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 - see introduction)

attacks by the Taliban or unidentified armed groups on Afghan security forces, including military, police and NDS personnel as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis*.^{2207, 2208} Examples of such incidents included attacks on military or police checkpoints, such as: Taliban assaults on security outposts in Shakardara district in July 2020²²⁰⁹ and in Khak-e Jabbar district in September 2020,²²¹⁰ Taliban attacks on police checkpoints in Paghman district in May 2020²²¹¹ and in January 2021,²²¹² in Guldara district in June 2020²²¹³ and in Qarabagh district in November 2020;²²¹⁴ as well as ambushes on security convoys/vehicles, such as: a Taliban attack on an Afghan military convoy in the Tangi area of Surobi district in February 2020,²²¹⁵ the kidnapping and killing of three Afghan soldiers by the Taliban when their convoy left the military base of Darban in Khak-e Jabbar district in August 2020²²¹⁶ and an unknown gunmen attack on an NDS convoy while escorting an UN convoy on the Kabul-Jalalabad Highway in Surobi district in February 2021;²²¹⁷ the shooting of security personnel by unknown gunmen in Qarabagh district in July 2020²²¹⁸ and November 2020²²¹⁹ (killing one civilian), in Kalakan district in July 2020²²²⁰ (killing one civilian), in Paghman district in August 2020²²²¹ and December 2020²²²² and in February 2021,²²²³ and in Bagrami district in October 2020,²²²⁴ November 2020²²²⁵ and in February 2021.²²²⁶ Apart from the ones mentioned above, no further information on civilian casualties reported during these incidents was found among the sources consulted.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs and criminal groups were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.²²²⁷ For example: in May 2020, a criminal gang leader was killed by police forces in the Cheh Dukhtaran area of Chaharasyab district.²²²⁸ Also in May 2020,

²²⁰⁷ For more information on *arbaki*: see section 1.2.1 Pro-government forces.

²²⁰⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²²⁰⁹ Tolonews, Insurgents Attack Security Checkpoints in Kabul, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

²²¹⁰ Tolonews, 1 Taliban Killed, 2 Wounded in Kabul Clashes: MoD, 8 September 2020, [url](#)

²²¹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: Attacks on Healthcare during the Covid-19 Pandemic, June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

²²¹² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

²²¹³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, updated 25 June 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 15 Soldiers Killed in Past Day Despite Unofficial Truce, 6 June 2020, [url](#); AP, Separate Attacks Kill 14 Afghan Forces in Kabul, Northeast, 6 June 2020, [url](#)

²²¹⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#)

²²¹⁵ Liveuamap, Afghanistan – Taliban: Enemy Convoy Engaged on Kabul-Jalalabad Highway in Tangi Area of Sarubi District Kabul on Sun. Resulting in 2 Pickup Trucks Destroyed & 5 Gunmen Killed/Wounded, 3 February 2020, [url](#)

²²¹⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Bodies of 3 Captured, Tortured, Executed ANA Soldiers Found, 13 August 2020, [url](#)

²²¹⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, 5 Security Personnel Killed in Attack while Escorting UN Convoy, 11 February 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Five Afghan Security Force Members Killed in Attack on UN Convoy, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

²²¹⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

²²¹⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#)

²²²⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

²²²¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²²²² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#)

²²²³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#)

²²²⁴ Tolonews, 5 Killed in Spate of Security Incidents in Kabul, 4 October 2020, [url](#)

²²²⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#)

²²²⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#); Reportedly, [Twitter], posted on: 17 February 2021, [url](#)

²²²⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²²²⁸ Khaama Press, Gang Leader Killed During a Clash with the Police Forces in Kabul, 18 May 2020, [url](#)

several ISKP militants were killed and arrested in an NDS operation in Shakardara district.²²²⁹ In June, July, August and December 2020, several Taliban members were arrested during operations in Qarabagh²²³⁰ and Shakardara districts.²²³¹ Two prominent Taliban commanders were killed in military operations in Surobi district in September 2020.²²³² Operations in Paghman district resulted in the killing of a key Taliban commander in October 2020²²³³ and in the killing and arresting of two magnetic bomb planters in February 2021.²²³⁴ In February 2021, the Afghan government reported on military operations in Surobi district, killing and wounding several Taliban fighters and clearing a large area from the militants in Dagari and Jegdalak.²²³⁵

AGEs, using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeted the Afghan security forces.²²³⁶ These attacks represented about 38 % of all reported security incidents in Kabul province. The majority of these IED incidents were recorded in Kabul district (see chapter on Kabul City).²²³⁷ Several IED incidents in other districts of Kabul province resulted in casualties among civilians. This happened for example in June 2020, when a roadside bomb detonated in Qarabagh district²²³⁸ and in Paghman district, killing several family members of writer and analyst Assadullah Walwalji.²²³⁹ Mid-July 2020, five civilians were killed and several others injured when a minibus hit a Taliban-planted roadside bomb in Surobi district.²²⁴⁰ In November 2020, a senior Afghan telecom official was killed in a magnetic bomb blast in Bagrami district; there was no claim of responsibility for the attack.²²⁴¹ In February 2021, one civilian was killed and two others injured when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb in Bagrami district.²²⁴² On 8 May 2021, at least 64 people were killed and 187 injured after a Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) followed by two bomb explosions²²⁴³ targeted a girls school in west of Kabul city.²²⁴⁴

²²²⁹ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Raid Daesh Hideout North of Kabul, 6 May 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Capture Key Figures From Islamic State's South Asia Branch, 11 May 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 'Key' Daesh Leaders Arrested in Kabul: NDS, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

²²³⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Key Taliban Figures Arrested in Kabul's Qarah Bagh, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

²²³¹ Tolonews, 1 Taliban Killed, 4 Arrested in Police Operation in Kabul, 21 July 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Kabul Police Kill Taliban Militant, Arrest 4 Others During an Operation, 21 July 2021, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Taliban Killed, 25 Detained in Kabul Operations, 17 August 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Taliban Unit Leader Arrested in Kabul Operation, 23 August 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Busted in Kabul, 14 December 2020, [url](#)

²²³² Tolonews, Key Taliban Commander Killed in Afghan Forces Operation, 18 September 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Key Taliban Commander Killed in Kabul, 23 September 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Commander Killed in Sarobi Operation, Police Claim, 23 September 2020, [url](#)

²²³³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Commander Killed in Kabul Operation, 10 October 2020, [url](#)

²²³⁴ Reportedly, [Twitter], posted on: 10 February 2021, [url](#)

²²³⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²²³⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, 3 Blasts Hit Kabul, 2 Bodies Found in Deh Sabz, 7 February 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Two More Killed as Afghan Capital Reels under Near-Daily Violence, 10 February 2021, [url](#)

²²³⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²²³⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, updated 25 June 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Explosion Leaves 4 Dead, Wounded in Kabul, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

²²³⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, updated 25 June 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Afghan Writer Walwalji Loses 4 Family Members in IED Blast, 20 June 2020, [url](#)

²²⁴⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, At Least Four Civilians Killed by Kabul Roadside Bomb, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

²²⁴¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Senior Afghan Telecom Official Killed in Blast, 1 November 2020, [url](#)

²²⁴² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2021, 4 March 2021, updated 1 April 2021, [url](#)

²²⁴³ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 9 May 2021, [url](#)

²²⁴⁴ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 8 May 2021, [url](#)

Seven incidents were registered as ‘suicide bombs’ in Kabul province by ACLED. The majority of these events were reported in Kabul district (see chapter on Kabul City).²²⁴⁵ One suicide bomb attack was reported in Chaharasyab district: an unidentified suicide bomber detonated his explosives near an ANDSF special operations facility in the Reshkor area in April 2020, causing several civilian casualties.²²⁴⁶ Two suicide bomb attacks were reported in Paghman district: mid-November 2020, four Afghan soldiers were killed and several others injured when a military compound was hit by a suicide car bomb;²²⁴⁷ in December 2020, at least one civilian was killed in an unidentified militant’s suicide attack near a funeral event at a mosque.²²⁴⁸

ACLED coded about 3 % of the violent incidents in Kabul province as ‘shelling, artillery and missile attacks’. For example: the Taliban reported on shelling an Afghan military base in Surobi district in January 2020 and on a grenade attack of their militants on a security checkpoint in Paghman district in September 2020. In February 2020, ISKP reportedly fired missiles on a US military base in Bagrami district. Some of these incidents resulted in civilian casualties. In September and October 2020, the Taliban reported on the killing and injuring of several civilians when residential areas were shelled by the Afghan military forces in Musayi district.²²⁴⁹

ACLED categorised around 17 % of all reported violent incidents in Kabul province as ‘violence against civilians’.²²⁵⁰ The majority of these incidents were recorded in Kabul district (see chapter on Kabul City). Examples of these incidents in the province’s other districts included: the shooting of several members of President Ashraf Ghani’s personal security team while off-duty by unknown gunmen in Paghman district in April 2020;²²⁵¹ the killing of the Supreme Court’s administrative chief by unidentified gunmen in Surobi district in May 2020;²²⁵² the shooting of two prosecutors and three other employees of the office of the Attorney General in Dehsabz district in June 2020;²²⁵³ the killing of the head of the biometrics department of the Ministry of Interior by unknown gunmen in Chaharasyab district in July 2020;²²⁵⁴ the shooting of two government engineers by Taliban militants in Kalakan district²²⁵⁵ and an attack on Fawzia Koofi (member of the government’s peace negotiating team) by unknown gunmen in Qarabagh district,²²⁵⁶ both in August 2020; the shooting of an army doctor by unknown gunmen in Bagrami district in October 2020;²²⁵⁷ and an unidentified militants’ ambush attack on Koh-e Safi’s district chief (Parwan province) in Kalakan district in November 2020.²²⁵⁸

²²⁴⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²²⁴⁶ RFE/RL, Afghanistan Suicide Bombing Kills at least Three, Wounds 15, 29 April 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Bombing near Afghan Capital Kills Three amid Unabated Violence, 29 April 2020, [url](#)

²²⁴⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Four Army Soldiers Killed in Car Bomb Attack in Paghman: MoD, 13 November 2020, [url](#)

²²⁴⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Suicide Bomber Targets Funeral Ceremony in Paghman, Killing 1, 21 December 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilian Killed in Paghman Suicide Attack, 21 December 2020, [url](#)

²²⁴⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²²⁵⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²²⁵¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Gunmen Shoot Dead Afghan Presidential Guard on Kabul Outskirts, 4 April 2020, [url](#)

²²⁵² Pajhwok Afghan News, Supreme Court Official Gunned Down in Kabul, 3 May 2020, [url](#)

²²⁵³ AP, Gunmen Kill 5, Including 2 Prosecutors, in Afghan Capital, 22 June 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, updated 25 June 2020, [url](#)

²²⁵⁴ Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on 8 July 2020, [url](#)

²²⁵⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²²⁵⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Peace Negotiator Kofi Injured in Armed Attack, 15 August 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Member of Afghanistan’s Peace Negotiating Team Injured in Militants Ambush, 15 August 2020, [url](#)

²²⁵⁷ Tolonews, Kabul Attacks: 3 Security Force Members Killed in Past 24 Hours, 13 October 2020, [url](#)

²²⁵⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Koh-i-Safi District Chief Injured in Kabul Attack, 29 November 2020, [url](#)

In recent years, many of the security incidents outside of Kabul City have taken place along Afghanistan's main highways and transit routes. AGEs regularly attacking Afghan security forces' outposts have reportedly caused problems for the movement of humanitarian aid workers and assets, as well as for ANDSF forces to distribute supplies.²²⁵⁹ In July 2020, a surge in security threats on the main highways connecting Kabul with neighbouring provinces was reported.²²⁶⁰ According to UNOCHA reporting in September 2020 and February 2021, the main roads connecting Kabul to Jalalabad, Logar, Ghazni, Bamyan, Kandahar and Paktika provinces remained insecure due to ongoing clashes between ANDSF forces and non-state armed groups, impacting civilian movements.²²⁶¹

In the beginning of 2020, road movements from Pul-i Khumri in Baghlan province to Kabul were interrupted due to the presence of non-state armed groups.²²⁶² In January 2020, the Taliban attacked the security outpost of Khwaja Zaid (Baghlan province) on the Kabul-Baghlan Highway, killing one police officer and wounding two others.²²⁶³ The same highway was attacked by the Taliban once more in February 2020 in the area of Doshi district (Baghlan province), resulting in the killing of a truck driver and the kidnapping of two civilians.²²⁶⁴ In July 2020, illegal Taliban checkpoints were reported on the Kabul-Baghlan Highway to Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province.²²⁶⁵ Many of the roads from Kabul to the north-eastern province of Badakhshan are reportedly controlled by insurgents, exposing travellers to Taliban checkpoints and capture.²²⁶⁶ Also on the Kabul-Baghlan Highway further on to Kunduz province, Taliban control and taxation was reported in October 2020.²²⁶⁷

On the highway between Kabul and Kandahar, passing through the provinces of Wardak and Ghazni and nicknamed 'the highway of death',²²⁶⁸ Afghan forces and the Taliban reportedly frequently engage in heavy fighting.²²⁶⁹ AGEs were reported controlling some parts of the road²²⁷⁰ and using roadblocks to target government employees and members of the Afghan security forces.²²⁷¹ Greater freedom of movement for the Taliban and a significant rise in their use of IEDs against ANDSF troops was reported on the Kabul-Kandahar Highway in October 2020 and in January 2021, with the Taliban conducting regular attacks (reportedly from trees and homes along the road) on government outposts and ANDSF troops abandoning many positions.²²⁷² Also in October 2020, 'makeshift' Taliban checkpoints were reported along the road (in the region of Ghazni province), with the militants going through smartphones from bus passengers.²²⁷³ Further on, this highway connects Kabul to Herat in the west. On the stretches of this strategically important Kabul-Herat Highway,

²²⁵⁹ UN Security Council, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/73/777-S/2019/193, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 14; USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Report to the United States Congress, 1 April - 30 June 2019, 16 August 2019, [url](#), p. 35

²²⁶⁰ Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

²²⁶¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 - 27 September 2020), 30 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²²⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 - 26 January 2020), 29 January 2020, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 - 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²²⁶³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, updated 30 January 2020, [url](#)

²²⁶⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²²⁶⁵ VOA, Taliban Attacks Continue as Negotiations Near, 20 July 2020, [url](#)

²²⁶⁶ New York Times (The), 'I Wake Up and Scream': Secret Taliban Prisons Terrorize Thousands, 27 February 2021, [url](#)

²²⁶⁷ Quilty, A., Taliban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan Conflict Has Changed since the Doha Agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

²²⁶⁸ Rolling Stone Magazine, Highway to Hell: A Trip Down Afghanistan's Deadliest Road, 22 January 2021, [url](#)

²²⁶⁹ Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

²²⁷⁰ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 29

²²⁷¹ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 52

²²⁷² Quilty, A., Taliban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan Conflict Has Changed since the Doha Agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#); Rolling Stone Magazine, Highway to Hell: A Trip Down Afghanistan's Deadliest Road, 22 January 2021, [url](#)

²²⁷³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Mines Afghan Phone Data in Bid for Control, 30 October 2020, [url](#)

which traverses much of the country, the Taliban operate a 'sophisticated highway tax scheme', reportedly earning between USD 155 000 to USD 195 000 a day.²²⁷⁴

The Kabul-Jalalabad Highway, an important trade route and often considered 'one of the world's most dangerous roads' (referring to numerous traffic accidents that have happened on this road), passes through areas where AGEs have been reported active - such as Surobi district.²²⁷⁵ In July 2020, 22 Taliban militants were killed or wounded during an ANDSF operation along this highway,²²⁷⁶ which reportedly faced increased security threats.²²⁷⁷ In August 2020, parts of the Kabul-Jalalabad Highway were blocked in Surobi district, due to landslides.²²⁷⁸

In a December 2019 AAN dispatch, analyst Ehsan Qaane described how the Kabul-Bamyan Highway, connecting the Hazarajat region to the capital and going through Jalrez district in Wardak province, has many side roads and mountain paths leading to several districts in Wardak, Parwan and Kabul provinces. According to Qaane, these serve as 'supply and escape routes' providing safe havens to militant groups and impeding the movement of government forces. The highway has two direct passes to Kabul's Paghman district through Kohna Khumar and Sanglakh.²²⁷⁹

Security threats reportedly increased on the Kabul-Gardez Highway, connecting Kabul to Logar and Paktya provinces, in July 2020.²²⁸⁰ According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, the location of Chaharasyab district along this highway is strategic for both the government and AGEs, affecting the security situation of the district's areas beside the highway.²²⁸¹ Several areas on this highway were reported under Taliban control, with the militants temporarily blocking the road and abducting government officials and NGO employees.²²⁸² In October 2020, Taliban militants attacked several security outposts in the Niazi area on the highway from Kabul to Logar, causing road blockades and traffic delays.²²⁸³ In November 2020, government employees were reportedly murdered by the Taliban on this highway between Kabul and the city of Khost.²²⁸⁴

Concerning attacks related to health care provision in 2020, the WHO registered 14 health care providers as severely affected (eight killed and six injured) and nine other persons affected (four killed and five injured) in Kabul district of Kabul province.²²⁸⁵ According to UNAMA reporting, a *madrassa* in Kabul province was raided by ANA soldiers in June 2020, on suspicion that Taliban militants were inside. Multiple classrooms were damaged.²²⁸⁶ Human rights activists and media personnel faced continuous security threats in Kabul.²²⁸⁷ In its 2020 Annual Report, the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC) registered 44 incidents involving violence against journalists in Kabul province, accounting most cases (33 %) of violence and threats to the Kabul zone.²²⁸⁸ According to UNAMA data, eight human rights defenders, journalists and media workers were killed

²²⁷⁴ New York Times (The), On Afghan Highways, Even the Police Fear the Taliban's Toll Collectors, 1 November 2020, updated 12 November 2020, [url](#)

²²⁷⁵ Diplomat (The), Next Stop Jalalabad: Traveling One of the World's Most Dangerous Roads, 13 December 2015, [url](#)

²²⁷⁶ Khaama Press, 22 Taliban Militants Killed, Wounded on Kabul-Jalalabad Highway, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

²²⁷⁷ Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

²²⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Flash Update No. 1: Localised Floods in Central and Eastern, 26 August 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²²⁷⁹ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

²²⁸⁰ Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

²²⁸¹ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 25

²²⁸² Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²²⁸³ Ariana News, [Twitter], posted on: 13 October 2020, [url](#)

²²⁸⁴ New York Times (The), On Afghan Highways, Even the Police Fear the Taliban's Toll Collectors, 1 November 2020, updated 12 November 2020, [url](#)

²²⁸⁵ WHO, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (January 01 - December 31, 2020, 11 January 2021, [url](#)

²²⁸⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 38

²²⁸⁷ UN Security Council, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 9 December 2020, Report of the Secretary-General, [url](#), p. 10

²²⁸⁸ AJSC, Annual Report 2020, 2021, [url](#), pp. 4, 8

in Kabul province in 2020.²²⁸⁹ Mid-2020, UNOCHA indicated the impact of the unstable security situation in Kabul on government resources and law enforcement in the province, contributing to rising criminality.²²⁹⁰

2.15.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 - 28 February 2021, reporting 900 persons displaced from Kabul province, of which the majority (868) were displaced within the province itself, constituting a group of 124 families that were displaced within Surobi district in July 2020. The remaining 32 IDPs from Kabul (from Surobi and Qarabagh districts) sought shelter in neighbouring provinces Nangarhar (Surkhrod district) and Kunar (Asadabad district) in November 2020 and January 2021.²²⁹¹

During the same period, UNOCHA collected data on 3 652 persons displaced to Kabul province, coming from other provinces (Badakhshan, Baghlan, Bamyan, Daykundi, Faryab, Ghazni, Kapisa, Kunduz, Logar, Nangarhar, Samangan, Takhar and Wardak) and all relocating to in Kabul district. Most IDPs arriving in Kabul province came from the provinces of Baghlan (959) (mainly from Dahan-e Ghor and Doshi districts, with a peak from January to April 2020), Wardak (448) (from Saydabad and Jalrez districts, with a peak in April 2020) and Ghazni (420) (from Andar district, with a peak in March 2020). Smaller groups of IDPs came from the provinces of Logar (315) (from Baraki Barak and Chak districts), Daykundi (301) (from Gizab/Patoo, Nili and Kiti districts), Kunduz (271) (mainly from Chardarah and Dasht-e Archi districts), Kapisa (238) (all from Tagab district) and Faryab (210) (all from Dawlatabad district).²²⁹²

In its Weekly Humanitarian Update from 5 - 11 October 2020, UNOCHA reported on ongoing needs assessments for 6 482 people displaced by conflict in Kabul province.²²⁹³

According to IOM displacement data from January to June 2020, Kabul is indicated as one out of eight provinces where 63 % of Afghan IDPs and 49 % of Afghan returnees reside. IOM ranked Kabul district fourth out of the countrywide top 25 districts hosting most IDPs and returnees.²²⁹⁴

²²⁸⁹ UNAMA, Special Report: Killing of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Media Workers in Afghanistan 2018-2021, February 2021, [url](#), p. 22

²²⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 - 12 July 2020, 15 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²²⁹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

²²⁹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

²²⁹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 - 11 October 2020), 14 October 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²²⁹⁴ IOM, DTM Afghanistan, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results Round 10 Jan-June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 6

Zhire, Shah Wali Kot, Khakrez, Arghistan, Ghorak, Maiwand, Spin Boldak, Nesh, Miyanishin, Shorabak, Maruf, Reg (Shiga), Dand (temporary district) and Takhtapul (temporary district).²²⁹⁷

According to NSIA estimates in 2019-2020, the province has a population of 1 368 036, with 614 811 of its residents living in the provincial capital Kandahar City.²²⁹⁸

The majority of Kandahar's population belongs to Pashtun tribes with the confederation of the Durani tribes being the largest one. It is divided into sub-confederations: Panjpayi and Zirak. There are also some Ghilzai tribes. The Balochs live in the Kandahar's desert leading a nomadic life and they often deals with smuggling.²²⁹⁹ Hazaras and Tajiks, as well as other ethnicities are usually referred to as *Farsiwan*, i.e. Farsi/Dari speakers.²³⁰⁰ They mainly live in cities and towns.²³⁰¹

The Ring Road (Highway One) connects the provincial capital of Kandahar with the major population centres of Herat and Kabul. A northbound road towards Uruzgan forks in Kandahar City.²³⁰² In March 2018, the Afghan news portal Tolonews described the Kandahar-Kabul-Herat highway as being '[...] in extremely bad condition due to heavy road usage, a lack of maintenance and continued attacks by insurgents'.²³⁰³ Heading southwards, a road connects the city of Kandahar with the Afghan-Pakistani border crossing at Spin Boldak-Chaman.²³⁰⁴ It is one of the most important border-crossing with Pakistan, leading to Quetta at Pakistani side. Border towns Spin Boldak and Chaman are considered as the major smuggling hubs with a flourishing bazaar called Wesh situated in Spin Boldak.²³⁰⁵ The Pakistani government has been trying to build a fence along the border to improve the border control and to prevent illegal border-crossing from Afghanistan. Spin Boldak residents protested against the fence and Afghan security services tried many times to prevent the fence construction anytime Pakistani forces attempted to have a fencing operation completed which has led to frequent cross-border clashes and shelling.²³⁰⁶

According to the airport website, an airport with scheduled passenger services to domestic and international destinations exists in Kandahar City.²³⁰⁷

2.16.2 Conflict background and actors in Kandahar

After U.S. and NATO combat mission started in 2001, local Taliban surrendered and returned to their homes. There was not however any amnesty for them, and constant persecutions pushed them out to Pakistan where they restarted insurgency and new recruitment.²³⁰⁸ Taliban received support especially from Durrani Panjpayi tribes which were largely excluded from government position in the province.²³⁰⁹ According to Anand Gopal, a journalist and a scholar, tribal leaders in the province

²²⁹⁷ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 37

²²⁹⁸ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 33

²²⁹⁹ Kohistani, Kandahar profile, 2016, [url](#); Sabawoon A. and Rutting T., Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the 'American tribe', AAN 12 August 2019, [url](#)

²³⁰⁰ Naval Postgraduate School, Kandahar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²³⁰¹ Kohistani, Kandahar profile, 2016, [url](#); Sabawoon A. and Rutting T., Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the 'American tribe', AAN 12 August 2019, [url](#)

²³⁰² LCA, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

²³⁰³ Tolonews, Seven Die In Kandahar-Herat Highway Accident, 14 March 2018, [url](#)

²³⁰⁴ LCA, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

²³⁰⁵ Sabawoon A. and Rutting T., Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the 'American tribe', AAN 12 August 2019, [url](#)

²³⁰⁶ Sabawoon A. and Rutting T., Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the 'American tribe', AAN 12 August 2019, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Army repulses Pakistan's Durand Line fence bid, 13 April 2020, [url](#); VOA, Pakistan Border Fencing Disrupts Local Trade in Chaman, 18 December 2020, [url](#)

²³⁰⁷ Kandahar Airport Webpage, n.d., [url](#); Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Inrikesflyg I Afghanistan, 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 12

²³⁰⁸ Gopal A., 'The Taliban in Kandahar', in: Bergen, P. (ed.), Talibanistan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp 2-4

²³⁰⁹ Gopal A., 'The Taliban in Kandahar', in: Bergen, P. (ed.), Talibanistan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp 16-18

could not remain neutral in the new conflict due to principles of revenge applied both by government forces and Taliban. The 'government allies often had to escape to the cities controlled by the government like Kandahar or Kabul. The rest had no choice but to ally with Taliban.'²³¹⁰

From 2006, Taliban has been able to conduct 'asymmetric warfare' against government in the province, conducting road attacks and suicide bombings.²³¹¹ Between 2010 and 2014 the powerful strongman and police chief General Abdul Razeq managed to 'build a network of local commanders loyal to him' that helped US to push out the Taliban from the province. Razeq appointed his allies as police chiefs of the key districts. ALP, in particular, was an important element of security management. Razeq was, however, accused of serious human rights abuses.²³¹²

Razeq managed to keep the Taliban away from the central Kandahar districts but he did not prevent some Taliban activity there, including bomb attacks and targeted killings. Since 2016, however, the Taliban have started regaining control in more remote districts of the province and in October 2018, Razeq was assassinated, allegedly by the Taliban.²³¹³

According to local officials and residents, the security situation deteriorated following the assassination of Razeq, with an increasing number of targeted killings and heavy losses among policemen and soldiers.²³¹⁴ Moreover, the security forces staff started 'taxing and abusing residents with little oversight'. Meanwhile, Taliban managed to get support from local tribal leaders and started to bribe low-level policemen to abandon their posts.²³¹⁵ In 2019, attacks increased in the remote districts, but the central parts remained relatively stable under government control. The Taliban however was capable to conduct the terrorist attacks, assassinations and small-scale shootings there. In order to prevent expansion by the Taliban, the government carried out armed operations, including air strikes.²³¹⁶ The new wave of heavy fighting started in October 2020. According to Al Arabiya, 'the insurgents have launched continuous attacks in several districts on the outskirts of Kandahar city, which still remains in the control of Afghan forces'.²³¹⁷

The Taliban movement was founded in Kandahar province, in a *madrassa* run by its now deceased leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar in Sangesar. Kandahar city was also the Taliban's quasi capital when they ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001.²³¹⁸ For the Taliban, Kandahar is a strategic province, not only because it is considered to be 'the birthplace of the group', but also because it borders with the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, which 'serves as the group's safe haven as well as a prime recruitment center'. In addition, Kandahar is a main region of production and distribution of opium, a major source of the Taliban's income.²³¹⁹ The UN reported on increased presence of AGEs on major transit routes in Afghanistan, including highways between Kabul and Kandahar, and Kandahar and Tirinkot.²³²⁰

As Anand Gopal wrote in 2013, Taliban established their formal administrative structures in the province: a shadow governor, Military Commission, district governors and local judges. In practise,

²³¹⁰ Gopal A., 'The Taliban in Kandahar', in: Bergen, P. (ed.), *Talibanistan*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, p. 31

²³¹¹ Gopal A., 'The Taliban in Kandahar', in: Bergen, P. (ed.), *Talibanistan*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp 2-4

²³¹² Sabawoon A. and Rutting T., *Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the 'American tribe'*, AAN 12 August 2019, [url](#)

²³¹³ Rutting, T., *The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban's strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections*, AAN, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

²³¹⁴ Stars and Stripes, *Violence escalates in strategic Afghan province as US continues peace talks*, 6 July 2019, [url](#)

²³¹⁵ New York Times (The), *The Taliban Close In on Afghan Cities, Pushing the Country to the Brink*, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

²³¹⁶ Sabawoon A. and Rutting T., *Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the 'American tribe'*, AAN 12 August 2019, [url](#)

²³¹⁷ Al-Arabiya, *Thousands of Afghan families flee fighting in Taliban bastion of Kandahar*, 7 January 2021, [url](#)

²³¹⁸ Sabawoon A. and Rutting Th., *Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the 'American tribe'*, AAN 12 August 2019, [url](#)

²³¹⁹ LWJ, *Taliban overruns Afghan army camp in Kandahar*, 19 October 2017, [url](#)

²³²⁰ UN Security Council, *The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace & Security*, Report of the Secretary-General, A/73/777-S/2019/193, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

many local military actions were not consulted within this structure. Moreover, some informal networks connecting field commanders with certain leaders in Quetta existed in parallel.²³²¹

UNAMA did not document attacks and civilian casualties caused by ISIL-KP activity in Kandahar province in 2019 or 2020,²³²² however at the beginning of April 2020, NDS forces detained several members of the top leadership of the organisation in Kandahar, including the ISKP's leader in Afghanistan, Abdullah Orakzai alias Aslam Farooqi, who originates from Pakistan.²³²³

A survey conducted by Pajhwok Afghan News, from November 2020 until February 2021, designated 40.28% of Kandahar territory and 67.27% of population under government control, 53.61% of territory and 29.37% of population under Taliban control and 6.11% territory and 3.35% population controlled by neither side. The only entire district with its centre under Taliban control is Reg.²³²⁴ According to LWJ, the districts of Ghorak, Nesh, Miya Nishin and Maruf are under control of Taliban. Maiwand, Khakrez, Shah Wali Kot, Arghandab, Arghistan on the north, Reg and Shorabak on the south are 'contested'. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Shah Wali Kot and Reg districts shifted to 'Taliban control'.²³²⁵

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Kandahar province increased by 47 %.²³²⁶

Kandahar is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps, supported by the US Train, Advice, and Assist Command-South (TAAC-S) which has its headquarters in the province.²³²⁷ It was to be handed over to Afghan forces after Doha Agreement but due to general unrest the final withdrawal was delayed. New York Times reported in February 2021 that there is still a small detachment of US and NATO troops in the province.²³²⁸ The counterterrorism operations are under responsibility of NDS 03, called also Kandahar Strike Force (KSF) which is based in the former headquarters of Mullah Omar.²³²⁹

ANSF representatives complain that 'they're severely understaffed and their pleas for support have gone unheeded by officials in Kabul'. During attack, police 'puts up very little fight'. In December 2020, almost 200 checkpoints in Zhire, Maiwand, Arghandab and Panjwayee were abandoned by Afghan soldiers who had left their military equipment and ammunition there.²³³⁰

2.16.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 540 civilian casualties (189 deaths and 351 injured) in the province of Kandahar. This represents an increase of 16 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were non-suicide IEDs, ground engagements, followed by targeted killings.²³³¹

²³²¹ Gopal A., 'The Taliban in Kandahar', in: Bergen, P. (ed.), Talibanistan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, p. 31

²³²² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 43; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, February 2020, [url](#), p. 36

²³²³ Diplomat (The), The Islamic State Remains Alive in Afghanistan, 27 April 2020, [url](#)

²³²⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

²³²⁵ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

²³²⁶ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²³²⁷ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

²³²⁸ The New York Times, The Taliban Close In on Afghan Cities, Pushing the Country to the Brink, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

²³²⁹ HRW, "They've Shot Many Like This" Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#) p.13

²³³⁰ The New York Times, The Taliban Close In on Afghan Cities, Pushing the Country to the Brink, 15 February 2021, [url](#); Al-Arabiya, Afghan troops, police abandon nearly 200 checkpoints to Taliban, 30 December 2020, [url](#)

²³³¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED reported a total of 770 incidents related to security in Kandahar province, of which 496 battles, 240 remote violence, 33 cases of violence against civilians and one incident concerning a prison riot.²³³²

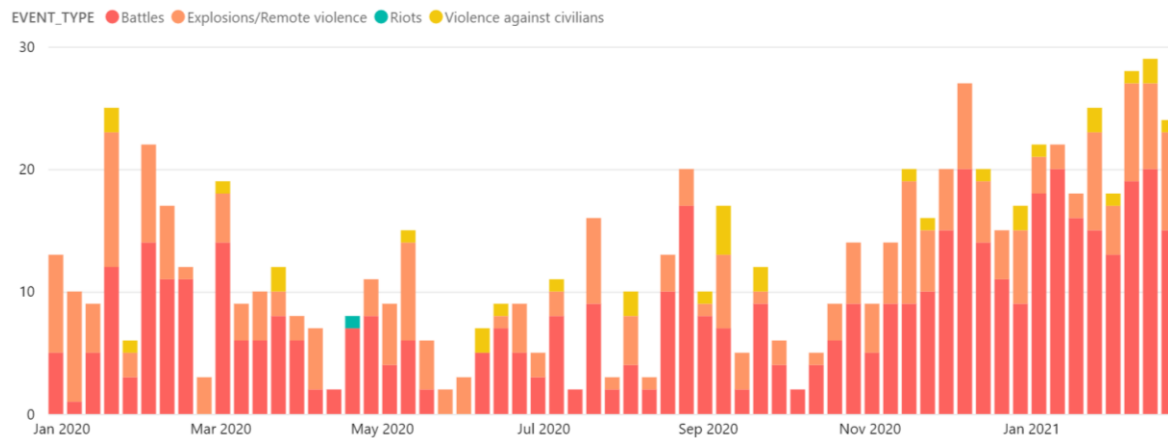


Figure 32: Kandahar province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²³³³

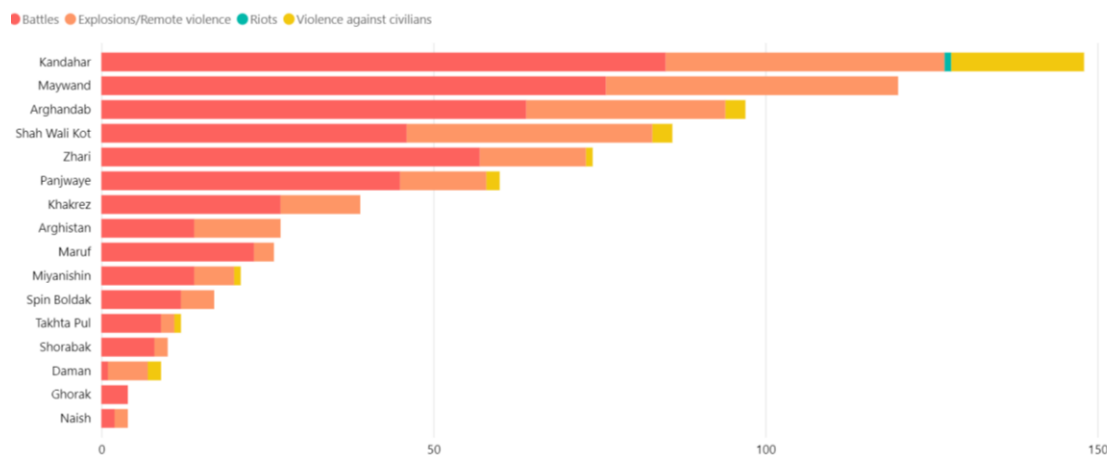


Figure 33: Kandahar province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²³³⁴

In 2020 and at the beginning of 2021, clashes between security forces and AGEs took place mainly in districts surrounding Kandahar city: Maiwand, Arghandab, Zhire and Panjwayee.²³³⁵ At the end of February 2021, Taliban was closer to Kandahar city as ever before and neighbouring Panjwayee district was near to collapse.²³³⁶

²³³² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kandahar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²³³³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kandahar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²³³⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kandahar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 16 events (9 battles and 7 remote violence) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

²³³⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update, 26 October – 1 November 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update, 25-31 January 2021, [url](#)

²³³⁶ New York Times (The), The Taliban Close in on Afghan Cities, Pushing the Country to the Brink, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

According to UNAMA, the main cause of civilian deaths in Kandahar province in 2020 were non-suicide and IEDs explosions. The organisation reported 101 civilians killed due to IEDs.²³³⁷ For example, on 3 June 2020, nine passengers travelling by bus between different districts of the province were killed by explosion of roadside bomb.²³³⁸ Between 7 and 9 August 2020, UNAMA registered five cases of IEDs explosions in Arghistan district which killed in total 26 civilians. Taliban 'denied responsibility for four out of five' these incidents.²³³⁹

On 10 April 2020 US drone killed three civilians in Shah Wali Kot district.²³⁴⁰

Kandahar city witnessed a high number of targeted killings in the reported period. AGEs targeted a policewoman in February 2020²³⁴¹, a tribal elders²³⁴² in March 2020, a former policeman, a doctor and a former district governor of Sangin district in three separate attacks in June 2020²³⁴³, three market-sellers and Zhari district council Head in September 2020²³⁴⁴, a prosecutor for Kandahar / Dand district in December 2020²³⁴⁵, two imams²³⁴⁶ and a former bodyguard of president Hamid Karzai²³⁴⁷ were killed in various incidents in January and February 2021.²³⁴⁸

Early autumn in 2020 Taliban increased attacks in the districts surrounding Kandahar city which forced many people to leave their houses. Taliban closed the main road between Lashkargah and Kandahar for civilian movement.²³⁴⁹ In October 2020 large part of Kandahar was cut off from electricity and telecommunication²³⁵⁰ and on February 2021 a medical facility in Panjwayee was closed due to clashes leaving people without any access to health services.²³⁵¹ The villagers from Kandahar province, interviewed by The Guardian, were 'besieged by fighting' for few days and 'people were getting shot by both sides'. Afterwards Taliban captured the village and told them to leave their houses. They were directed to IDPs camp at the suburb of Kandahar. When men returned to the village to take more personal belongings, houses were partly destroyed and looted.²³⁵² Many families lost an access to their farms.²³⁵³

However in the beginning of 2021, 'negotiating team from Panjwai district, consisting of local farmers and tribal elders, Panjwai's police chief and other officials in Kandahar' managed to reach a local cease-fire with Taliban. It was to start in March 2021 and to last 10 days from 8.00 a.m. to 5 p.m.²³⁵⁴

²³³⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 49

²³³⁸ AP, Bus strikes roadside bomb in southern Afghanistan; 9 killed, 3 June 2020, [url](#)

²³³⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 50

²³⁴⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kandahar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²³⁴¹ Tolonews, Policewoman Killed by Unknown Gunmen in Kandahar, 05 February 2020, [url](#)

²³⁴² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

²³⁴³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²³⁴⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

²³⁴⁵ Khamaa Press, Ghor Council Deputy Killed in IED Blast, 15 December 2020, [url](#)

²³⁴⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#); Pajhwok, Prayer leader gunned down in Kandahar capital, 3 February 2021, [url](#)

²³⁴⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

²³⁴⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kandahar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²³⁴⁹ UN News, Thousands displaced by fighting in southern Afghanistan, 14 October 2020, [url](#)

²³⁵⁰ BBC News, Afghan-Taliban conflict: Families flee fresh fighting in Helmand, 13 October 2020, [url](#)

²³⁵¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), [url](#)

²³⁵² The Guardian (The), 'Shot at by both sides': Families flee as Taliban battles for territory in Kandahar, 24 February 2021, [url](#)

²³⁵³ Guardian (The), 'Shot at by both sides': Families flee as Taliban battles for territory in Kandahar, 24 February 2021, [url](#)

²³⁵⁴ New York Times (The), In One Afghan District, Peace From 8 A.M. to 5 P.M., 11 March 2021, [url](#)

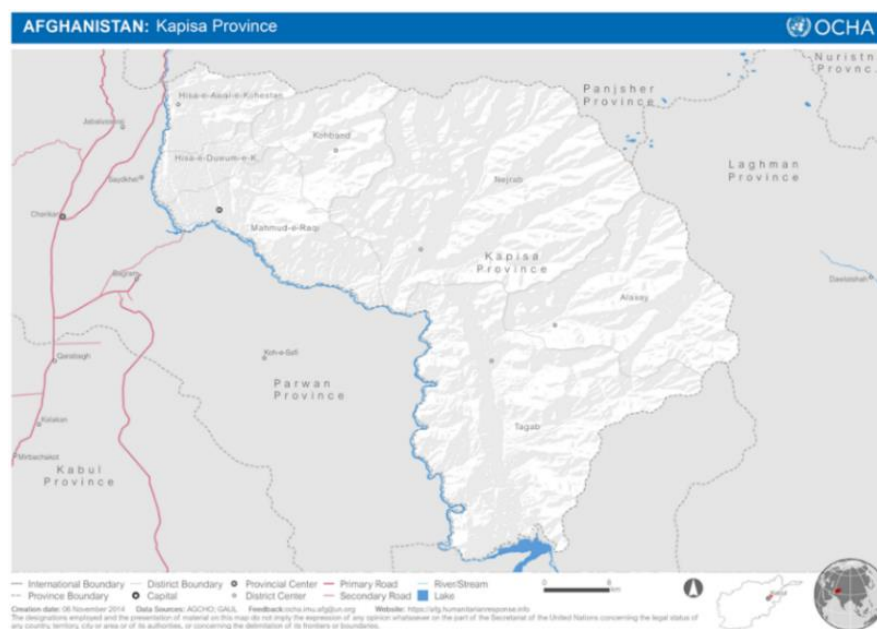
Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 22 788 persons displaced within Kandahar province and 7 from Kandahar province to Herat province. The biggest group of 8 868 persons was displaced within Kandahar/Dand district on the 1 January 2021. The group of 3 323 persons was displaced from Panjwai district in November 2020.²³⁵⁵ Other large groups arrived to Kandahar/Dand camp from Maiwand, Arghandab and Zhire districts also in October and November 2020.²³⁵⁶ The main destination was IDPs camps in Dand in the Kandahar city suburbs. The displacement in the province was caused by the Taliban offensive, which started in October 2020, and led to heavy fighting in the area.²³⁵⁷

In the reporting period, 2 461 persons were displaced to Kandahar province from other provinces, including 1 011 persons from Helmand, 1 100 from Uruzgan and 350 persons from Jawzjan.²³⁵⁸

2.17 Kapisa province

2.17.1 General description of the province



Map 17 : Afghanistan - Kapisa province, source: UNOCHA²³⁵⁹

Kapisa province is located in the central region of Afghanistan and is divided into the following districts: Alasay, Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan, Hisa-i Duwum-e Kohestan, Kohband, Mahmud-e Raqi, Nejrab and Tagab. The provincial capital is Mahmud-e Raqi.²³⁶⁰

According to estimates for 2019-20 by NSIA, Kapisa province has a population of 479 875.²³⁶¹

²³⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

²³⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

²³⁵⁷ UN News, Thousands displaced by fighting in southern Afghanistan, 14 October 2020, [url](#); Al-Arabiya, Thousands of Afghan families flee fighting in Taliban bastion of Kandahar, 7 January 2021, [url](#)

²³⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

²³⁵⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial Reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 16

²³⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kapisa Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, November 2019, [url](#), p. 6

²³⁶¹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 6

The main ethnic groups in Kapisa are Pashtun,²³⁶² Tajik and Nuristani.²³⁶³ Tajiks, constituting the largest single group, are mainly living in the northern part of the province. Pashtuns inhabit the province's southern region,²³⁶⁴ such as the Ghilzai tribe²³⁶⁵ in Tagab district.²³⁶⁶ Members of the Safi tribe are found in the districts of Kohband and Nejrab.²³⁶⁷ Other groups present include Hazara²³⁶⁸ and Pashai,²³⁶⁹ the latter residing in the mountainous areas of Alasay and Kohband districts.²³⁷⁰

A primary road connects Kapisa's capital Mahmud-e Raqi to Kabul City.²³⁷¹ In October 2020, ANA forces reportedly closed the main road connecting Alasay district with the provincial capital to prevent the movement of militants.²³⁷² There is no functioning airport for civil aviation located in Kapisa province.²³⁷³

2.17.2 Conflict background and actors in Kapisa

According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, Kapisa province has strategic importance, as '[...] it is a small province in the middle of almost everything: it is easy for insurgents to try and reach Kapisa's capital and the neighbouring provinces'. Foschini suggests Kapisa is 'sociologically divided' between southern districts more sympathetic towards militant groups, and a northern part, 'where allegiance to Jamiat-e Islami makes community support for the Taliban less likely'.²³⁷⁴ Kapisa's southern district of Tagab is connected to the Uzbini Valley in Surobi district of Kabul province and further to Bad Pakh district in Laghman province, through relatively easily traversable passes. According to Foschini, this broader region became 'an important crossing point and sanctuary for insurgents moving deeper into Afghanistan from the border area [with Pakistan]'.²³⁷⁵

According to a 2014 report by the New York Times, southern Kapisa 'has always been difficult terrain', adding that the battle between Taliban militants and government forces intensified after the French ISAF forces left the province in 2012. The Taliban's success was partially traced back to a lack of capacity or 'unwillingness' by the Afghan security forces to overtake Taliban-controlled areas in Kapisa, leading to US Special Forces' allegations of infiltration of the Afghan army by the militants or close cooperation between the ANA and AGEs. The Taliban in the area, on the other hand, were described as a disciplined force, 'able to operate freely'.²³⁷⁶

AAN analyst Obaid Ali defined the political landscape in Kapisa in 2015 as characterised by '[...] the never-ending story of local warlords and Taliban competing with each other [...]', in combination with '[...] the poor economic situation of many residents [which] contributes to the high rates of militancy and private feuds [...]' in some districts of the province.²³⁷⁷

²³⁶² FP, Are Ethnic Politics Afghanistan's Great Hope?, 11 November 2014, [url](#)

²³⁶³ US Naval Postgraduate School, Kapisa Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Tolonews, Provincial Profile: Kapisa, n.d., [url](#)

²³⁶⁴ Ali, O., Fire in the Pashai Hills: A Two-District Case Study from Kapisa, AAN, 6 April 2015, [url](#)

²³⁶⁵ US Naval Postgraduate School, Kapisa Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²³⁶⁶ FP, Are Ethnic Politics Afghanistan's Great Hope?, 11 November 2014, [url](#)

²³⁶⁷ US Naval Postgraduate School, Kapisa Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²³⁶⁸ Tolonews, Provincial Profile: Kapisa, n.d., [url](#)

²³⁶⁹ Ali, O. and Gharani, Kh., Hit from Many Sides (2): The Demise of ISKP in Kunar, AAN, 2 March 2021, [url](#)

²³⁷⁰ Ali, O., Fire in the Pashai Hills: A Two-District Case Study from Kapisa, AAN, 6 April 2015, [url](#)

²³⁷¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kapisa Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); LCA, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#)

²³⁷² Pajhwok Afghan News, Inconvenience as ANA Forces Close District Road in Kapisa, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

²³⁷³ Falling Rain, Directory of Airports in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); MSF, Afghanistan: Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#); Afghanistan, ACAA, All Airports, 24 September 2017, [url](#)

²³⁷⁴ Foschini, F., In Kabul's Shadow: The Attacks in the Provinces on 15-16 April, AAN, 24 April 2012, [url](#)

²³⁷⁵ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing Some of Afghanistan's Most Notorious Hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url](#)

²³⁷⁶ New York Times (The), Hour's Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014, [url](#)

²³⁷⁷ Ali, O., Fire in the Pashai Hills: A Two-District Case Study from Kapisa, AAN, 6 April 2015, [url](#)

In May 2020, the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reported to the UN Security Council on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made, including in Kapisa province.²³⁷⁸ In July 2020, AAN reported on the Taliban building up a presence to the northeast, north and northwest of Kabul, including in Kapisa province.²³⁷⁹ According to International Crisis Group, Kapisa witnessed an ‘unchanging or increasing’ level of Taliban violence in 2020.²³⁸⁰

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 12 March 2021, indicated Tagab, Alasay and Nejrab districts as ‘contested’. Nejrab district was designated as ‘government-influenced’. Kapisa’s remaining districts were categorised as ‘government-controlled’ or ‘undetermined’ in this assessment.²³⁸¹ A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021²³⁸² designated 58.71 % of Kapisa’s territory under government control, 37.24 % under Taliban control and 4.05 % controlled by neither side. According to the same survey, 286 701 of Kapisa’s inhabitants live in areas under government control, 181 833 of the province’s population live in areas under Taliban control and 19 764 of Kapisa’s residents live in areas controlled by neither side.²³⁸³

In March 2020, a Taliban attack in Afghania village in Nejrab was reported, described as the first battle in the area after it had been cleared from the Taliban²³⁸⁴ in December 2019.²³⁸⁵ Mid-June 2020, Taliban militants reportedly advanced to the district centre of Tagab, after taking 12 checkpoints of local uprising forces.²³⁸⁶ In the second half of June 2020, intense fighting between the Taliban and the Afghan government forces was reported in Tagab district whereby Taliban attacks forced the Afghan military to withdraw from several villages.²³⁸⁷ At the end of that month, the villages of Firoozkhil, Turkandian, Baishkel, Sarginan, Khanan and Badakhil in Tagab were reportedly cleared from the Taliban during ANA operations.²³⁸⁸ Mid-July 2020, the Taliban reportedly attacked the centre of Tagab district again but were pushed back by the Afghan security forces.²³⁸⁹ In October 2020, the Afghan Ministry of Defence reported on the killing of three Taliban commanders, identified as Qari Mir Agha, Qari Himmat Mohammad and Qari Naeem, in a security forces’ operation in Tagab district.²³⁹⁰ At the end of February 2021, the villages of Hajian, Khalifa Gan, Zakir Khel Kuchak and Badakhil in Afghania Dara of Nejrab district were reportedly cleared from the Taliban.²³⁹¹

Before Gulbuddin Hekmatyar signed a peace agreement with the Afghan government in September 2016, Kapisa was considered one of Hezb-e Islami’s strongholds.²³⁹² The group’s influence in the

²³⁷⁸ UN SECURITY COUNCIL, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9

²³⁷⁹ Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²³⁸⁰ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Overview, Afghanistan June 2020, June 2020, [url](#)

²³⁸¹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

²³⁸² Through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires, Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed a total of 1 266 respondents for this survey, randomly selected across the country. Pajhwok acknowledges the complexity of this task and the possible inaccuracy of the provided information.

²³⁸³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

²³⁸⁴ Tolonews, 4 Security Force Members Killed in Kapisa, 21 March 2020, [url](#)

²³⁸⁵ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 29 January 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²³⁸⁶ Tolonews, 4 Public Uprising Forces, 11 Taliban Killed in Kapisa: Official, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

²³⁸⁷ ACLED, Regional Overview: Central Asia and the Caucasus - 21-27 June 2020, [url](#)

²³⁸⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Security Forces Killed, 5 Injured in Kapisa Clash, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

²³⁸⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

²³⁹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Insurgent Killed in Kapisa Airstrike, Says MoD, 28 October 2020, [url](#)

²³⁹¹ Reporterly, 16 Al-Qaeda Members Killed in Kapisa: MoD, 1 March 2021, [url](#)

²³⁹² Van Bijlert, M. and Ruttig, T., Almost Signed? The Peace Agreement with Hezb-e Islami, AAN, 21 May 2016, [url](#)

province was reportedly the result of commander networks dating back to the 1980s. In early 2017, the number of active Hezb-e Islami insurgents in Kapisa was estimated at 60.²³⁹³

In February 2020, USDOD reported on small groups of ISKP supporters in Kapisa province.²³⁹⁴ One security incident specifically attributed to ISKP has been recorded in Kapisa between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021 by ACLED.²³⁹⁵ In February 2020, at least a dozen ISKP militants were killed and a hideout of the group was destroyed in a ground operation by Afghan commandos with air support in Nejrab district.²³⁹⁶ In a June 2020 USIP report, analyst Borhan Osman mentioned Tagab and Nejrab districts as areas where ISKP has been recruiting for its Kabul cell.²³⁹⁷

At the end of February 2021, the Afghan Ministry of Defence reported on the killing of 16 members of an Al Qaeda group during an operation in the Afghania area of Nejrab district.²³⁹⁸

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, Kapisa province 'lost its poppy-free status', as a 178-hectare land had been dedicated to opium poppy cultivation.²³⁹⁹

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Kapisa was reported to be under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps and included in the Train, Advise and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-E is led by US forces and has its headquarters in Nangarhar province.²⁴⁰⁰ In September 2020, local official sources in Nejrab reported on the presence of militia groups in the district, armed by the government and backed by the NDS. This claim was rejected by Vice President Amrullah Saleh.²⁴⁰¹

2.17.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 148 civilian casualties (42 deaths and 106 injured) in Kapisa province. This represented an increase of 19 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted killings and non-suicide IEDs.²⁴⁰² According to UNAMA, Kapisa is one of 16 provinces that experienced an increase in civilian casualties from ground engagements in 2020 compared to 2019.²⁴⁰³ Resolute Support (RS) recorded between 102 and 150 civilian casualties in Kapisa province in the first half of 2020, with no variation between the first and second quarter of the year.²⁴⁰⁴ RS data on civilian casualties per province for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.²⁴⁰⁵

²³⁹³ Johnson, C.G., The Political Deal with Hezb-e Islami: What It Means for Talks with the Taliban and Peace in Afghanistan, USIP, July 2018, [url](#), pp. 12, 25, 28

²³⁹⁴ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Report to the United States Congress, 1 October - 31 December 2019, 19 February 2020, [url](#), p. 13

²³⁹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kapisa province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²³⁹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Airstrikes Kill 13 Daesh Rebels in Kapisa, Kunar, 21 February 2020, [url](#); Bakhtar News, 12 ISIS Fighters Killed in Kapisa Operation, 22 February 2020, [url](#)

²³⁹⁷ Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join Islamic State, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 11-12

²³⁹⁸ Reportedly, 16 Al-Qaeda Members Killed in Kapisa: MoD, 1 March 2021, [url](#)

²³⁹⁹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), pp. 5, 9

²⁴⁰⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

²⁴⁰¹ Tolonews, Militia Armed in Kapisa's Nejrab District: Local Officials, 8 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁰² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

²⁴⁰³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72

²⁴⁰⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

²⁴⁰⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data from reports in open sources on 188 incidents related to insurgents in Kapisa province, of which 140 were coded as 'battles', 33 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 15 as 'violence against civilians'.²⁴⁰⁶

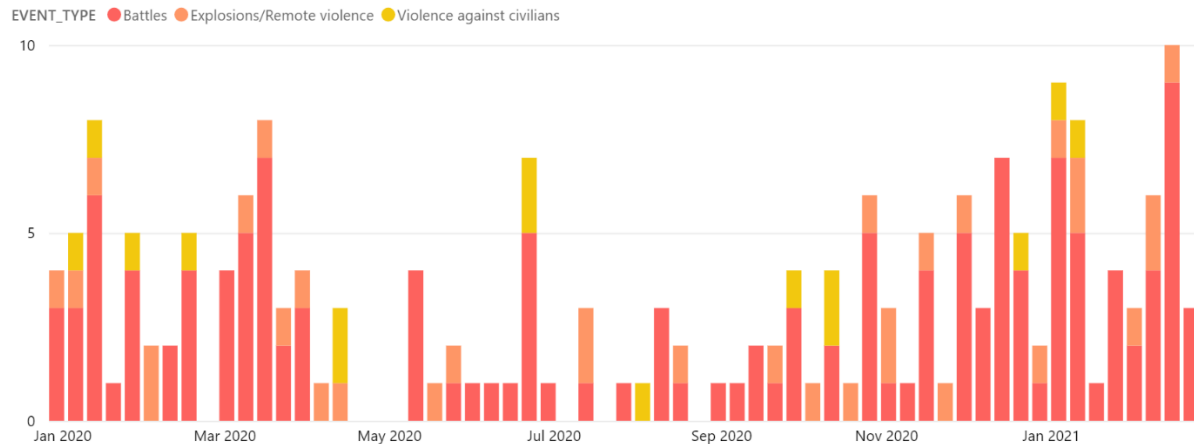


Figure 34: Kapisa province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²⁴⁰⁷

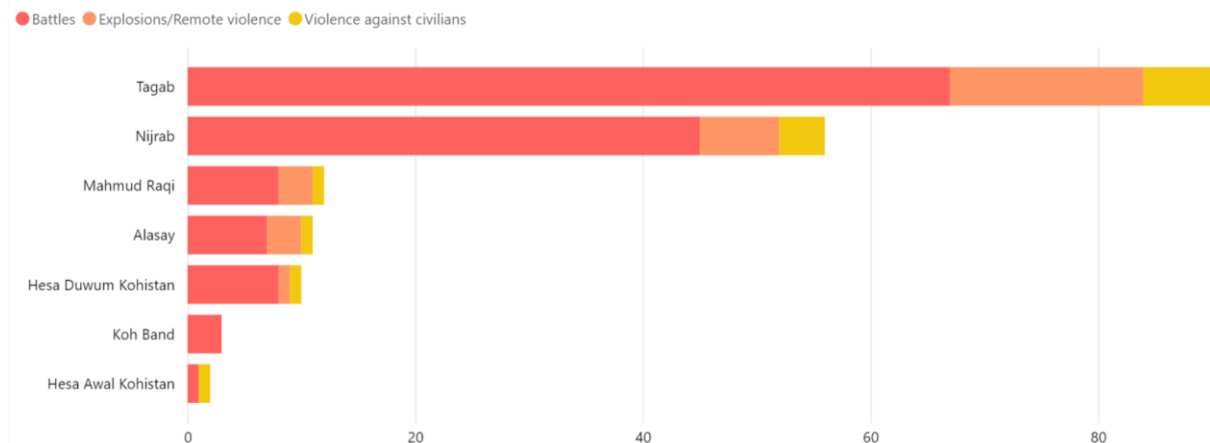


Figure 35: Kapisa province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²⁴⁰⁸

In its Hard-to-Reach Districts Map, published in February 2021, UNOCHA ranked Tagab district 29th out of 100 districts countrywide, with a conflict intensity of 3.8 (on a scale from 1.0 to 4.0).²⁴⁰⁹

ACLED recorded around 74 % of the violent incidents in Kapisa province as 'battles', nearly all of which were coded as 'armed clashes'. The majority of these clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS personnel and members of pro-government

²⁴⁰⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kapisa province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁰⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kapisa province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁰⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kapisa province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 4 incidents (1 battle, 2 remote violence and 1 violence against civilians) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 - see introduction)

²⁴⁰⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Access Group (HAG), Hard-to-Reach Districts - 11 February 2021, [url](#), p. 4

militias or so-called *arbakis*²⁴¹⁰.²⁴¹¹ Examples of such incidents included assaults on military or police checkpoints/outposts/bases in Nejrab district in February 2020,²⁴¹² in March 2020²⁴¹³ and in June 2020²⁴¹⁴ and in Tagab district in March 2020,²⁴¹⁵ in June 2020,²⁴¹⁶ in August 2020 (four civilians were wounded in the cross-fire)²⁴¹⁷ and in September 2020 (killing one civilian),²⁴¹⁸ as well as attacks/ambushes on the convoys/vehicles of police officers and pro-government militia members in Alasay district in January 2020,²⁴¹⁹ in Nejrab district in July 2020²⁴²⁰ and in Kohband district in October 2020.²⁴²¹ Further examples of these armed clashes included attacks by unknown gunmen on NDS and police personnel in Mahmud-e Raqi district in June 2020,²⁴²² in July 2020,²⁴²³ in November 2020²⁴²⁴ and in January 2021,²⁴²⁵ and in Hisa-i Duwum-e Kohestan district in November 2020.²⁴²⁶ Apart from the ones mentioned above, no further information on civilian casualties reported during these incidents was found among the sources consulted.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.²⁴²⁷ In a combined ground and air operation by the Afghan security forces in February 2020 in Nejrab district, a dozen Taliban militants were killed and several others were wounded and arrested. Two women were also reportedly killed in the operation.²⁴²⁸ During an operation in Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan district in June 2020, two NDS officers were reportedly killed by the gunman they aimed to arrest.²⁴²⁹ Various operations in Nejrab district in February 2021 reportedly killed and wounded several Taliban insurgents.²⁴³⁰

²⁴¹⁰ For more information on *arbaki*: see section 1.2.1 Pro-government forces.

²⁴¹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kapisa province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴¹² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Reuters, U.S.-Taliban Pact to Cut Violence About to Start, Afghan Minister Says Amid Clashes, 18 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Security Personnel, 3 Militants Killed in Kapisa Clash, 21 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Security Forces Killed, 5 Injured in Kapisa Clash, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁶ Tolonews, 4 Public Uprising Forces, 11 Taliban Killed in Kapisa: Official, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 ANA Soldiers Killed in Kapisa Attack, 14 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kapisa: 5 Policemen Killed in Taliban Attack, 13 September 2020, [url](#); Afganistan Times, 9 Security Forces Dead in Kapisa Attack, 21 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kapisa: District Intelligence Chief Killed in Taliban Ambush, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁴²⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴²¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Policemen Killed, As Many Wounded in Kapisa, 3 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁴²² Tolonews, Head of Kapisa Traffic Dept. Killed by Unknown Gunmen, 1 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁴²³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, District-Level NDS Head in Kapisa Killed by Unknown Gunmen, 25 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁴²⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, District Police Chief Killed in Kapisa Province, 17 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁴²⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁴²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Policewomen Injured in Kapisa Gun Attack, 22 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁴²⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kapisa province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Women among 14 Taliban Killed in Kapisa, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁴²⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 NDS Agents Killed by Illegal Gunman in Kapisa, 21 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁴³⁰ Reportedly, [Twitter], posted on: 21 February 2021, [url](#); Reportedly, [Twitter], posted on: 22 February 2021, [url](#); Reportedly, [Twitter], posted on: 24 February 2021, [url](#)

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces or pro-government militia members,²⁴³¹ represented about 11 % of all reported security incidents in Kapisa.²⁴³² Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. For example: in October 2020, three civilians were killed when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb in Tagab district;²⁴³³ in January 2021, five civilians were killed and nine more wounded (including the head of the provincial Ulema Council) in a magnetic car bomb explosion in the Sayyad area of the provincial capital Mahmud-e Raqi.²⁴³⁴

Shelling, artillery and missile attacks by the Taliban represented around 5 % of all registered incidents in Kapisa, with all attacks carried out in Tagab district.²⁴³⁵ Several of these incidents caused civilian casualties, when mortars, grenades or rockets landed on civilian homes and/or vehicles in March 2020,²⁴³⁶ in April 2020²⁴³⁷ and in July 2020.²⁴³⁸

During the reporting period ACLED recorded three air/drone strikes in Kapisa, all carried out by the Afghan military forces in Nejrab and Tagab districts in January and February 2020. These air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs.²⁴³⁹ Information on civilian casualties reported during these incidents was not found among the sources consulted.

ACLED categorised around 8 % of all violent events recorded in Kapisa as 'violence against civilians'.²⁴⁴⁰ These incidents involved for example: civilian vehicles being attacked by Taliban militants in Tagab district in March 2020²⁴⁴¹ and in October 2020;²⁴⁴² the killing of an appellate court judge by unidentified gunmen in Afghanha village in the area of PD 1 in June 2020;²⁴⁴³ the killing of an uprising forces commander and three of his family members by the Taliban in Tagab district in August 2020;²⁴⁴⁴ the killing of an imam by unknown gunmen in Nejrab district in October 2020;²⁴⁴⁵ the shooting of human rights activist Freshta Kohistani and her brother in Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan district in December 2020, following a string of targeted assassinations in several parts of the country;²⁴⁴⁶ the shooting of a civilian by unknown gunmen in Hisa-i Duwum-e Kohestan district in

²⁴³¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁴³² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kapisa province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴³³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 3 Civilians Killed in Kapisa Roadside Blast, 7 October 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 - 11 October 2020), 14 October 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁴³⁴ Tolonews, 5 Killed in Kapisa Blast, Local Ulema Head Wounded, 3 January 2021, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Killed, Top Kapisa Cleric among 9 Injured in Blast, 3 January 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁴³⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kapisa province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴³⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians, Policeman Killed in Kapesa Mortar Shell Attack, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁴³⁷ Khaama Press, Taliban Militants Kill 1 Civilian, Wound 3 Others in Kapisa Province, 20 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁴³⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Killed, 8 Injured in Kapisa Mortar Attack, 19 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴³⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kapisa province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kapisa province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁴¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁴² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁴³ Tolonews, Gunmen Shoot and Kill Judge in Kapisa, 23 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Kill 4 Men of Kapisa Family, 6 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁵ Khaama Press, Mullah Shot Dead in Morning Prayer Hours, 15 October 2020, [url](#); Reportedly, Imam Assassinated In Kapisa, Taliban Attack In Zabul, 15 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁶ DW, Women's Rights Activist Shot Dead in Afghanistan, 24 December 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Prominent Afghan Women's Rights Activist Assassinated, 24 December 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Targeted Killings Are Terrorizing Afghans. And No One Is Claiming Them, 2 January 2021, [url](#); UNAMA, Special Report: Killing of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Media Workers in Afghanistan 2018-2021, February 2021, [url](#), p. 26

January 2021,²⁴⁴⁷ and the killing of an off-duty police officer in a Taliban attack on his house in Tagab district in January 2021.²⁴⁴⁸

The WHO did not register any attacks related to health care provision in Kapisa province in 2020.²⁴⁴⁹ In August 2020, an MTN telecommunication tower was reportedly burned down by the Taliban in Tagab district.²⁴⁵⁰

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 - 28 February 2021, reporting 1 211 persons displaced from Kapisa province, of which the majority (910) were displaced within the province itself (finding refuge in Nejrab, Mahmud-e Raqi, Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan and Hisa-i Duwum-e Kohestan districts). The remaining 301 IDPs from Kapisa sought shelter in neighbouring provinces Kabul (238) (Kabul district) and Parwan (35) (Bagram district) and in the eastern province Nangarhar (28) (Surkhrod district). The majority of IDPs in Kapisa province were displaced from Tagab district (756), with a peak in January - February 2020, further throughout the whole year 2020 and another small peak in January 2021. A smaller number of IDPs was displaced from Nejrab district (294) in January and March 2020 and January 2021, as well as from Alasay district (161) in March and August 2020 and January 2021.²⁴⁵¹

During the same period, UNOCHA collected data on 126 persons from other provinces displaced to Kapisa, all coming from Tala Wa Barfak district in Baghlan province in January 2020. This group of 18 IDP families relocated to Mahmud-e Raqi district.²⁴⁵²

According to IOM displacement data from January to June 2020, Kapisa is one of five provinces (the other provinces indicated as Jawzjan, Paktika, Wardak and Zabul) that showed a sharp increase in the number of IDPs, 'most likely due to people fleeing to safer areas to escape the ongoing armed conflict'.²⁴⁵³

In December 2020, UNOCHA reported on temporary movement restrictions imposed in Kapisa province, due to the increasing risk of IED attacks, affecting humanitarian activities.²⁴⁵⁴

²⁴⁴⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁹ WHO, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (January 01 - December 31, 2020), 11 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁵⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Mobile Phone Tower Torched in Kapisa, 7 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁵¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

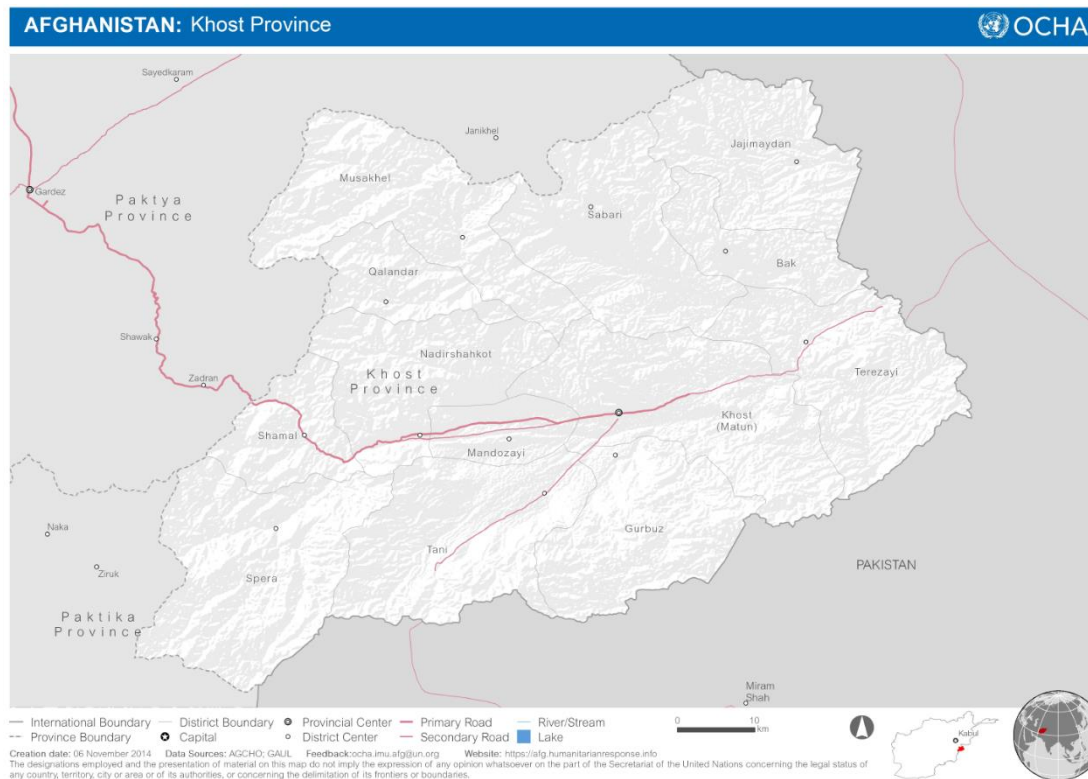
²⁴⁵² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁵³ IOM, DTM Afghanistan, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results Round 10 Jan-June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²⁴⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 - 27 December 2020), 27 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

2.18 Khost

2.18.1 General description of the province



Map 18: Afghanistan – Khost province, source: UNOCHA²⁴⁵⁵

A part of Loya Paktia (i.e. ‘Greater Paktia’), an area also encompassing the provinces of Paktia and Paktika²⁴⁵⁶, the province of Khost is located in the eastern part of Afghanistan²⁴⁵⁷ and is divided into the following districts: Ali Sher (Terezayi), Bak, Gurbuz, Jajimaydan, Khost (Matun), Mandozayi (Esmayel Khel), Musa Khel, Nadirshahkot, Qalandar, Sabari (Yaqubi), Shamal, Spera, and Tani. The provincial capital of Khost is the city of Khost.²⁴⁵⁸

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 625 473. The rural population accounts for 98 % of the total.²⁴⁵⁹

One of the three major Pashtun regions of Afghanistan²⁴⁶⁰, the province is inhabited by a large number of Pashtun tribes, the most prominent being the Zadran, Mangal, Tani, Gurbuzi, Babakar Khel, Jaji, Sabari, Terezai, Mandozai, Moqbil, and Ismael Khel.²⁴⁶¹ In 2013, US-based Tribal Analysis Center (TAC) described the Zadran as a historically strong but also ‘loose tribe’, characterized by

²⁴⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Provincial Reference Map – Khost Province, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 17

²⁴⁵⁶ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 1

²⁴⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: South Eastern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁴⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Khost Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#), Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Khost, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, November 2019, [url](#), p. 23

²⁴⁵⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 19

²⁴⁶⁰ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 1

²⁴⁶¹ TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 8

infighting and multiple political affiliations.²⁴⁶² Another group present is Tajik (approximately 1 %).²⁴⁶³ TAC also mentioned the presence of other minorities (Sikhs, Hazaras) in Khost City.²⁴⁶⁴ Furthermore, over 50 000 nomad families (Kuchis and Musalyans) are said to live in Khost seasonally.²⁴⁶⁵ In April 2020, RFE/RL's Gandhara also pointed out that, from 2014 onwards, military operations in North Waziristan caused 7 000 families to seek shelter in Khost and Paktika.²⁴⁶⁶

In 2013, TAC described Khost as a '[...] major transit hub for trade from Pakistan [...]'.²⁴⁶⁷ Khost reportedly has three border crossings with Pakistan: Ghulam Khan, Babrak Tanai and Zazai Maidan.²⁴⁶⁸ Closed in 2014 due to military operations in Pakistan's North Waziristan, the first one has been fully reopened in August 2019. Since then, the residents of Paktya, Paktika and Khost are reportedly allowed to get into Pakistan with their *tazkira*, under the condition that they have relatives living on the other side of the Durand Line.²⁴⁶⁹ There is also an unofficial motorable crossing point to Pakistan in Jajimaydan district, which has been temporarily closed in the past as well.²⁴⁷⁰ Nevertheless, according to various media sources, in the last years, the Pakistani military has hindered cross-border movements by installing border fencing, for example in Gurbuz district.²⁴⁷¹

The Gardez-Khost national highway (G-K Highway, or NH08) links the province to Pakistan, on one side, and to neighbouring Paktya, Logar and ultimately Kabul, on the other.²⁴⁷² According to the US development agency USAID, rehabilitation work was completed in December 2015.²⁴⁷³

A November 2020 report of the Afghan Civil Aviation Authority mentions two aerodromes in Khost: 'Khost/Chapman (OAKS)' and 'Salerno (OASL)', respectively 15 kilometres southwest and 2 kilometres northeast of Khost City.²⁴⁷⁴ A 2016 map by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) classifies them as 'small airports'.²⁴⁷⁵ In its 2021 report on Afghan domestic air traffic, Sweden's Migration Agency stated that it was unclear if Khost's airports were open to commercial and civilian flights.²⁴⁷⁶

2.18.2 Conflict background and actors in Khost

In 2009, Thomas Ruttig noted that Loya Paktya – encompassing Khost – has never been a Taliban stronghold.²⁴⁷⁷ AAN stated in August 2018 that Khost '[...] features an active insurgency, but it remains somewhat curtailed by strong tribal affiliations and cohesive local communities'. It also noted that due to the mountainous terrain of Khost, AGEs are largely dependent on the collaboration

²⁴⁶² TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 8

²⁴⁶³ US Naval Postgraduate School, Khost Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁴⁶⁴ TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 8

²⁴⁶⁵ TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 9 ; Giustozzi, A., Nomad-settler conflict in Afghanistan today, AREU, 13 November 2019, [url](#), p. 14

²⁴⁶⁶ RFE/RL/Gandhara, In Afghanistan, Lockdown Hits Waziristan Refugees Hard, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁶⁷ TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 9

²⁴⁶⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost market unaffected by closure of Pakistan border, 8 July 2016, [url](#)

²⁴⁶⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Af-Pak trade via Ghulam Khan route set to resume, 5 March 2018, [url](#); Sabawoon, A. M., The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost market unaffected by closure of Pakistan border, 8 July 2016, [url](#); Sabawoon, A. M., The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁷¹ Tolonews, Durand Line Fencing Splits Afghan Families, 31 March 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Pakistan Fences Off Afghanistan, Impacting Families And Fighters, 5 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁷² LCA, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#); New York Times (The), Costly Afghanistan Road Project Is Marred by Unsavory Alliances, 1 May 2011, [url](#)

²⁴⁷³ US, USAID, Gardez-Khost National Highway (NH08) Overview, 7 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁴ Afghanistan, Civil Aviation Authority, Aeronautical Information Publication – Aerodrome (AD), Part 3, 5 November 2020, [url](#), pp. 6, 361, 445

²⁴⁷⁵ MSF, Afghanistan: Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#), p. 3

²⁴⁷⁶ Sweden, Swedish Migration Agency, Landinformation: Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan (version 4.0), 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 14

²⁴⁷⁷ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktya's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 2

of locals, as ‘the sworn hostility of even a minor community can be a logistical nightmare for insurgents, as they have to rely on mountain routes or secrecy for the security of their movements and the success of their operations.’ AAN concluded that ‘this discourages acts that would antagonise whole communities.’²⁴⁷⁸

In May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mawlawi Abdullah Hussaini, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the Taliban shadow governor in Khost. He was appointed after the ‘reshuffle’ of the Taliban government structure ahead of the 2020 fighting season.²⁴⁷⁹ However, the former was reportedly replaced by Mawlawi Mubarak in early 2021.²⁴⁸⁰ Moreover, Khost is one of the provinces where the UN Security Council observed ‘strong ties’ between the Taliban and organised criminal groups involved in heroin, hashish, pine nut trafficking or local businesses extortion.²⁴⁸¹

Described in 2009 as ‘the strongest insurgent structure in Loya Paktia’, the Haqqani Network has reportedly been most active in the ‘Zadran Arc’, an area encompassing nine districts of Khost, Paktya and Paktika.²⁴⁸² Its late founder Jalaluddin Haqqani was a member of the Zadran tribe.²⁴⁸³ The group is affiliated with the Taliban, though it declared itself independent from the Quetta Shura from 2007 to 2015.²⁴⁸⁴ Declassified US cables quoted by Associated Press (AP) stated that, contrary to other Taliban factions, the Haqqani Network ‘[...] functions more in the military area, and is not a force in setting Taliban political or social issues’²⁴⁸⁵, a perception seemingly shared by Ruttig.²⁴⁸⁶ The Haqqani Network reportedly maintains close ties to the Pakistani secret service, ISI, as well as other Pakistani militant groups and Al Qaeda.²⁴⁸⁷ LWJ stated that the Haqqani Network had allowed and supported previous attacks conducted by Al Qaeda or the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) on military facilities in Khost.²⁴⁸⁸

In June 2019, the UN Security Council stated that the Haqqani Network numbered between 1 800 and 2 000 fighters leading Taliban operations in Khost, Paktya and Paktika, with the help of TTP militants. The report added that in Loya Paktya, the Network was holding all of the main shadow government positions (provincial governors and district governors).²⁴⁸⁹ In May 2020, the UN Security Council added that the Haqqani Network was planning a joint unit of 2 000 fighters with Al

²⁴⁷⁸ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁹ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9, 12, 25, 27

²⁴⁸⁰ Tolonews, Taliban Reshuffles Key Posts as New Fighting Season Nears, 6 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁸¹ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, S/2019/481, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 12

²⁴⁸² Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), pp. 8-9

²⁴⁸³ AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁴ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, Landinfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), p. 9

²⁴⁸⁵ AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁶ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 8

²⁴⁸⁷ AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 46; New York Times (The), Costly Afghanistan Road Project Is Marred by Unsavory Alliances, 1 May 2011, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁸ LWJ, In tribute to Hakeemullah Mehsud, TTP exposes ties to Afghan Taliban, Al Qaeda, 13 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁹ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, S/2019/481, 13 June 2019, [url](#), pp. 17-18

Qaeda.²⁴⁹⁰ Throughout 2019 and 2020, the Afghan security forces led several operations against the Haqqani Network in Khost and notably killed twelve of its commanders in Sabari district.²⁴⁹¹

In February 2021, the UN Security Council listed Khost among the 11 provinces where Al Qaeda was present, with forces estimated between 200 and 500.²⁴⁹² UNAMA added that its main tasks consist in 'training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring'.²⁴⁹³

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, Khost province remained a poppy-free province.²⁴⁹⁴

In terms of presence of government security forces, as of December 2020, Khost province was under the responsibility of the 203th ANA Corps.²⁴⁹⁵ At that time, it was not assisted anymore by the Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces, that was still active in June 2020.²⁴⁹⁶

A 2020 AAN report focused on locally-rooted security forces, discussing the geographical differences in performance of the ALP in security improvement and treatment of the population, observed that the robust and 'relatively egalitarian' tribal structures of Loya Paktya and its tradition of local defence groups (*arbaki*) had contributed to 'more instances of effective, less abusive forces'.²⁴⁹⁷ Following the disbandment of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) in September 2020, some of its members are meant to join another local force created in 2018, the Afghan National Army – Territorial Force (ANA-TF). AAN noted that Khost was one of the provinces where local communities were involved in the identification and vetting of potential ANA-TF recruits, to 'actively ensure there was local support for the programme'.²⁴⁹⁸

In 2015, the Washington Post listed the Khost Protection Force (KPF) as the most influential security actor in the province.²⁴⁹⁹ Foreign Policy described it as 'the most prominent of several CIA-sponsored elite paramilitary forces along the porous border with Pakistan', where it is charged with keeping the border secure and preventing the entry of terrorists in Khost but also in neighbouring provinces.²⁵⁰⁰

In November 2020, journalist Emran Feroz described KPF as in control 'of much of Khost'. From its inception, the force was made of local Pashtun fighters and benefitted from modern weapons and equipment provided by the CIA.²⁵⁰¹ According to UNAMA, it operates outside of the regular military structure and without any legal basis in south-eastern Afghanistan since at least 2007, with frequent support from foreign military forces and the Afghan air force.²⁵⁰² Headquartered at Camp Chapman, outside Khost City, the KPF manpower ranges between 3 000 and 10 000, plus a network of

²⁴⁹⁰ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 13

²⁴⁹¹ Tolonews, 12 Haqqani Network Commanders Killed In Khost, 11 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost: 20 crime suspects arrested in a week, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁹² UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 15

²⁴⁹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 85-86

²⁴⁹⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²⁴⁹⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²⁴⁹⁶ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 14 ; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²⁴⁹⁷ Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN and GPPI, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 46-47

²⁴⁹⁸ Clark, K. et al., Afghanistan's Newest Local Defence Force: Were 'all the mistakes of the ALP' turned into ANA-TF safeguards?, AAN, August 2020, [url](#), pp. 6, 34, 35

²⁴⁹⁹ Washington Post (The), CIA runs shadow war with Afghan militia implicated in civilian killings, 3 December 2015, [url](#)

²⁵⁰⁰ FP, How the CIA Aims to Keep a Footprint in Afghanistan, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁰¹ Feroz, E., Atrocities Pile Up for CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitary Forces, FP, 16 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁰² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 53, 57

informants.²⁵⁰³ As a hub for joint US and Afghan counterterrorism operations, Camp Chapman has been the target of several AGEs attacks over the years, most recently in December 2020.²⁵⁰⁴

The KPF has been accused of being responsible for executions and other abuses, including imprisoning journalists, but investigations into these allegations have never been conducted, despite promises of the Afghan authorities.²⁵⁰⁵ This has contributed to ‘anti-government sentiment and spark protests among the civilian population’.²⁵⁰⁶ According to the New York Times, the KPF is ‘among the most criticized parts of the American war effort’, due to its ‘brutal, lawless’, methods.²⁵⁰⁷

A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 to February 2021²⁵⁰⁸ estimated that 70.54 % of Khost’s territory (636 522 inhabitants) was under government control, 28.69 % (182 633 inhabitants) under Taliban control, and an exceedingly small fraction, representing less than 6 000 persons, was controlled by neither side.²⁵⁰⁹

According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, Gurbuz, Jajimaydan, Musa Khel, Nadirshahkot, Qalandar, Sabari, Spera, Tere Zayi (Ali Sher) districts are assessed as ‘contested’, while Bak, Khost, Mandozay, Shamal and Tani are listed as government-controlled or undetermined. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Nadirshahkot and Qalandar districts shifted to ‘Taliban control’.²⁵¹⁰

However, in April 2020, French daily newspaper Libération stated that Sabari district was under Taliban control.²⁵¹¹ Lastly, the February 2021 Pajhwok survey listed Qalandar district centre as under Taliban control, with the government employees having to work remotely.²⁵¹²

2.18.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 281 civilian casualties (56 deaths and 225 injured) in Khost. This represents an increase of 43 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were non-suicide IEDs, followed by targeted killings and complex attacks. Khost was also one of the provinces where UNAMA noted an increase in civilian casualties from ground engagements.²⁵¹³ Resolute Support recorded between 76 and 125 civilian casualties in Khost in the first half of 2020, reporting a very marked increase during the second quarter compared to the first.²⁵¹⁴ Such data for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.²⁵¹⁵

²⁵⁰³ HRW, “They’ve Shot Many Like This” Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁰⁴ FP, Another Base Attack in Afghanistan Hushed Up to Hurry U.S. Exit, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁰⁵ Feroz, E., Atrocities Pile Up for CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitary Forces, FP, 16 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁰⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 9, 58, 64-65

²⁵⁰⁷ New York Times (The), To Save Afghan Peace Deal, U.S. May Scale Back C.I.A. Presence, 17 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁰⁸ For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country.

²⁵⁰⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁵¹⁰ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., [url](#) However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

²⁵¹¹ Libération, Naître et donner la vie en pays pachtoun [To be born and to give life in Pashtun country], 11 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁵¹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁵¹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 72, 110

²⁵¹⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69 ; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

²⁵¹⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data on 201 violent events in Khost province from open sources: 98 coded as ‘battles’ (49 %), 78 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ (39 %) and 25 as ‘violence against civilians’ (12 %).²⁵¹⁶

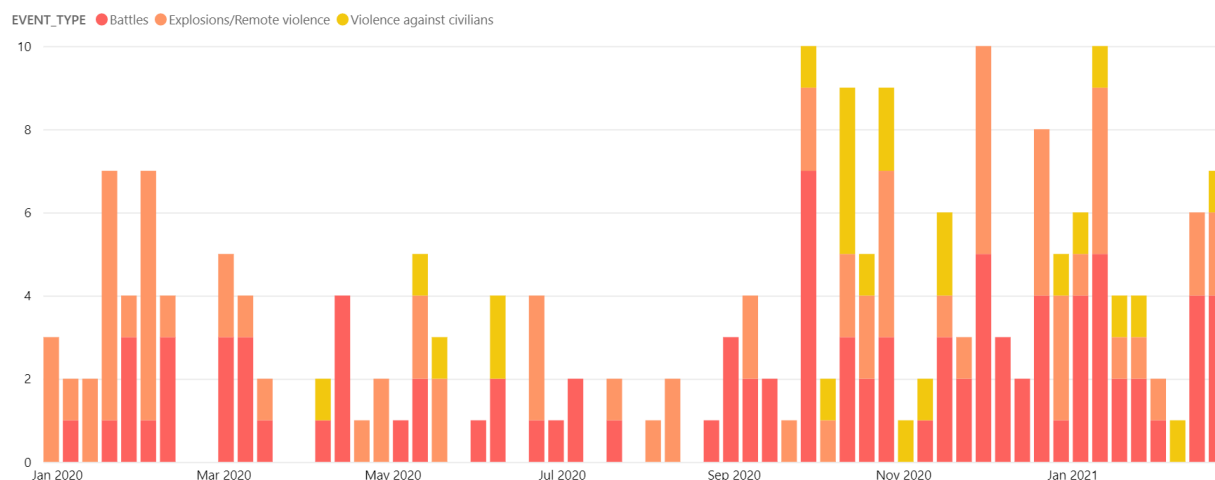


Figure 36: Khost province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²⁵¹⁷

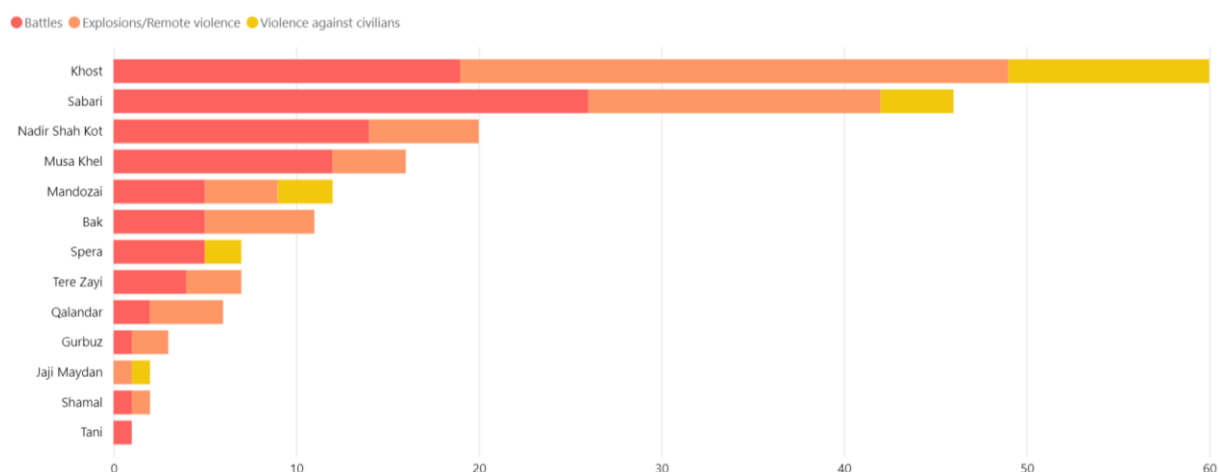


Figure 37: Khost province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²⁵¹⁸

Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, all of them were ‘armed clashes’. In this category, the Sabari district was a distant leader (26 incidents), followed by Khost (19), Nadirshakot (14) and Musa Khel (12). Conversely, the nine other districts recorded five or less battles each. Of the 98 armed clashes analysed by ACLED, 88 were described as initiated by the Taliban, and 4 others by unidentified armed groups. According to ACLED data, Taliban attacks mainly focused on Khost,

²⁵¹⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Khost province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵¹⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Khost province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵¹⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Khost province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 8 events (3 battles, 1 remote violence and 4 violence against civilians) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

Nadirshahkhot, Musa Khel and Sabari districts, only targeting ANDSF and pro-government militias.²⁵¹⁹

Examples of armed clashes include the killing by ANDSF of about 40 Taliban on two distinct events in Musa Khel district, while repelling attacks in June and July 2020.²⁵²⁰ In October 2020, an explosion followed by a 10-hour fight took place at a police special forces base, in the western part of Khost City. Overall, seven attackers and five police officers were killed, and 34 other people (nine civilians) wounded. No group claimed responsibility for this event.²⁵²¹ Foreign Policy also reported an unclaimed attack on KPF-headquarters, Camp Chapman, northeast of Khost City, in December 2020, causing 13 fatalities (six civilians).²⁵²² In December 2020, in Sabari district, a Taliban ambush targeting an ANDSF vehicle made four to six fatalities, including several civilians.²⁵²³

In some districts, while the fighting appeared to significantly decrease following the eight-days 'reduction in violence' period in February 2020²⁵²⁴, in May 2020, RFE/RL's Gandhara observed that 'the security situation [had] been deteriorating' in the previous weeks.²⁵²⁵ In its August 2020 assessment based on several criteria, including conflict severity and spread, UNOCHA listed three Khost districts among the 50 'hardest to reach' in the country: Tere Zayi (n°16), Sabari (n°22), and Bak (n°47) districts.²⁵²⁶ The February 2021 update mentioned Sabari (n°40) and Tere Zayi (n°41) again, along Musa Khel (n°54) and Nadirshahkhot (n°59). Bak, however, was not deemed 'hard to reach' anymore.²⁵²⁷

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as 'Explosions/Remote violence', the most represented sub-category was clearly 'Remote explosive/Landmine/IED' (82 %). These incidents were all attributed to AGEs, particularly to the Taliban. The provincial capital's district alone accounted for about 45 % of such incidents.²⁵²⁸ In Khost City, deadly events took place in September, with an unclaimed bomb killing 2 civilians, 2 soldiers and wounding 13 other people²⁵²⁹, and in December 2020, when on 2 consecutive days, 2 landmine blasts caused 5 fatalities and wounded a total of 15 people.²⁵³⁰ Khost City district witnessed other deadly incidents in October²⁵³¹ and November²⁵³² 2020, as well as in January²⁵³³ and February 2021²⁵³⁴. On 2 March 2020, 3 civilians were killed and 11 injured when a

²⁵¹⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Khost province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵²⁰ Reportedly, Over 40 Taliban Killed By Afghan Forces, 30 June 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban militants suffer heavy casualties in Khost; at least 29 killed, wounded, 25 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁵²¹ AP, Officials: Attack in eastern Afghanistan kills 5 police, 27 October 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Three Dead, Several Wounded In Attack On Afghan Police Base, 27 October 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Attack on Police Special Unit in Khost Ends, Gunmen Killed, 27 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁵²² FP, Another Base Attack in Afghanistan Hushed Up to Hurry U.S. Exit, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁵²³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 31 December 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 7 Civilians, 2 ANA Soldiers Killed in Faryab, Khost, 22 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁵²⁴ AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, [url](#); Clark, K., Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (2): Assessing the conflict a month after the US-Taliban agreement, AAN, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁵²⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Mosque Attacks Kill 13 Worshippers Breaking Fast, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁵²⁶ UNOCHA, Hard To Reach Districts, August 2020, [url](#)

²⁵²⁷ UNOCHA, Hard-To-Reach Districts, February 2021, [url](#)

²⁵²⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Khost province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵²⁹ Khaama Press, Blast Rocks Wedding in Khost, Kills 4, 11 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁵³⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Landmine blast leaves 8 civilians wounded in Khost, 23 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁵³¹ TKG, Afghanistan: Khost Blast Kills One, Injures 6, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁵³² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 – 29 November 2020), 3 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁵³³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁵³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#)

bomb exploded during a football match in Nadirshahkot district. Although they denied it, the Taliban were suspected to have planned the attack.²⁵³⁵

As for violence against civilians, based on ACLED data, Khost City district accounted for half of the recorded incidents. Four other districts experienced lower levels of such violence (Jajimaydan, Mandozayi, Sabari and Spera), the remaining eight (Bak, Gurbuz, Musa Khel, Nadirshahkot, Qalandar, Shamal, Tani and Tere Zayi) being unaffected by it.²⁵³⁶ Despite a 52% decrease in the number of civilian casualties attributed to the KPF in 2020, UNAMA expressed particular concern over the trend of deliberate killings of civilians suspected of involvement with AGEs. In the last quarter of 2020, 12 civilians were reportedly killed by the KPF in Khost province across eight incidents, during search operations and ground engagements. For instance, in October 2020, the KPF deliberately shot dead a civilian in Matun (Khost) district.²⁵³⁷ Foreign Policy also mentioned that in October-November 2020, in retaliation to Taliban attacks, the KPF conducted several raids in several villages of Khost district's Lakan area, causing at least five civilian fatalities.²⁵³⁸

In Sabari, two unclaimed shootings against worshippers praying in mosques resulted in four deaths overall in May 2020.²⁵³⁹ Other incidents included the killing of nine civilians in the same home by unknown gunmen in Mandozayi district in June 2020.²⁵⁴⁰

As of June 2020, Khost was one of the five remaining Afghan provinces where MSF was still operating medical programs.²⁵⁴¹ UNAMA documented several attacks on health professionals and facilities in 2020, attributed to all warring parties. In November 2020, a pro-government militia killed a dentist in November 2020, for unknown reasons.²⁵⁴² In January 2021, a doctor was wounded in an unclaimed bomb blast in Khost City.²⁵⁴³ UNOCHA further stated that, during the last quarter of 2020, humanitarian workers had been wounded in an IED explosion, in an unspecified district of Khost.²⁵⁴⁴

Regarding schools, in their response to the 2020 UNAMA report, the Taliban accused the ANDSF of damaging a school in Musa Khel district, during an alleged 'indiscriminate' shelling on a village.²⁵⁴⁵

Local journalists were also victims of abuses by government friendly elements and AGEs. In July and September 2020 respectively, the NDS was accused of searching the house of two journalists without a warrant²⁵⁴⁶, and of detaining a journalist 'who frequently spoke out against rights abuses'.²⁵⁴⁷ In

²⁵³⁵ RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Ends Partial Truce As Deadly Bombing Hits Near Soccer Ground, 2 March 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Blast in Khost Kills Three Civilians: MoI, 2 March 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), U.S. Announces Troop Withdrawal in Afghanistan as Respite From Violence Ends, 2 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁵³⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Khost province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵³⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 62, 65, 69

²⁵³⁸ Feroz, E., Atrocities Pile Up for CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitary Forces, FP, 16 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁵³⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Mosque Attacks Kill 13 Worshippers Breaking Fast, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁴¹ AP, MSF closes Kabul program after May maternity hospital attack, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁴² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 36-37, 53

²⁵⁴³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 policemen killed in Jalalabad, doctor wounded in Khost, 16 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁴ UNOCHA, HAG Quarterly Report, 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 8

²⁵⁴⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 126

²⁵⁴⁶ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, 18 August 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²⁵⁴⁷ Feroz, E., Atrocities Pile Up for CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitary Forces, FP, 16 November 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Khost Mother Calls on NDS to Release her Journalist Son, 9 September 2020, [url](#); UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General, 9 December 2020, [url](#), p. 10

January 2021, two men, purportedly tasked by the Haqqani Network to kill a journalist in Khost City, were arrested.²⁵⁴⁸

Several public agents or local political figures have been under attack as well. For instance, in April 2020, an unclaimed bomb exploded along the convoy of provincial governor Hamil Fidai, who survived.²⁵⁴⁹ In June 2020, a member of the Hezb-e Islami, also a former candidate in 2019 general elections, was killed along with his seven bodyguards by unknown gunmen, in the Ali Sher district.²⁵⁵⁰ In October 2020, in two distinct events, two employees of the provincial appeal court were shot in Khost district.²⁵⁵¹ In November 2020, the New York Times mentioned a recent trend of killing and abductions of government employees by the Taliban on the Khost-Kabul highway.²⁵⁵²

In March 2021, Afghan newspaper Etilaatroz reported on the deterioration of the security situation along the road connecting Khost City to Jajimaydan district for the last two months, prompting protests from local residents. Assassinations, robberies and abductions were attributed to a lack of security checkpoints along the roads – claims that the local authorities acknowledged.²⁵⁵³

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 2 135 persons displaced from Khost – one of the lowest provincial figures recorded over the period. All of them relocated in the provincial capital's district. During the same period, 84 persons from Logar province and 175 from Paktika province were displaced to Khost, also in Khost City district.²⁵⁵⁴

The main district of origin of IDPs was Sabari (840), accounting for 40 % of Khost total numbers. It was distantly followed by Terezayi (343), Musa Khel (287) and Bak (224). Six districts appeared to be unaffected by population displacement.²⁵⁵⁵

Displacements peaked in January/February, April and August 2020.²⁵⁵⁶ According to UNOCHA reports, ongoing conflict and, to a lesser extent, natural disasters appeared to be the main causes of displacement.²⁵⁵⁷

²⁵⁴⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Journalist's assassination prevented in Khost, 3 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Attacks Across Afghanistan Kill Dozens Of Security Force Members, Civilians, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁰ AP, 18 people killed in separate attacks in Afghanistan, 13 June 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁵¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁵² New York Times (The), On Afghan Highways, Even the Police Fear the Taliban's Toll Collectors, 12 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁵³ Etilaatroz, د خوست مرکز – ځاځي ميدان ناامنه لار؛ ناپېژنده وسله والو له تېريدونکو ژپې پرې او ډېر نور ښکته او وژني [informal translation, 'Khost Center - Zazi Maidan Insecure Road, Unidentified gunmen cut the tongues of passers-by and killed many more after getting them off the vehicle'], 16 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 5 April 2021, [url](#)

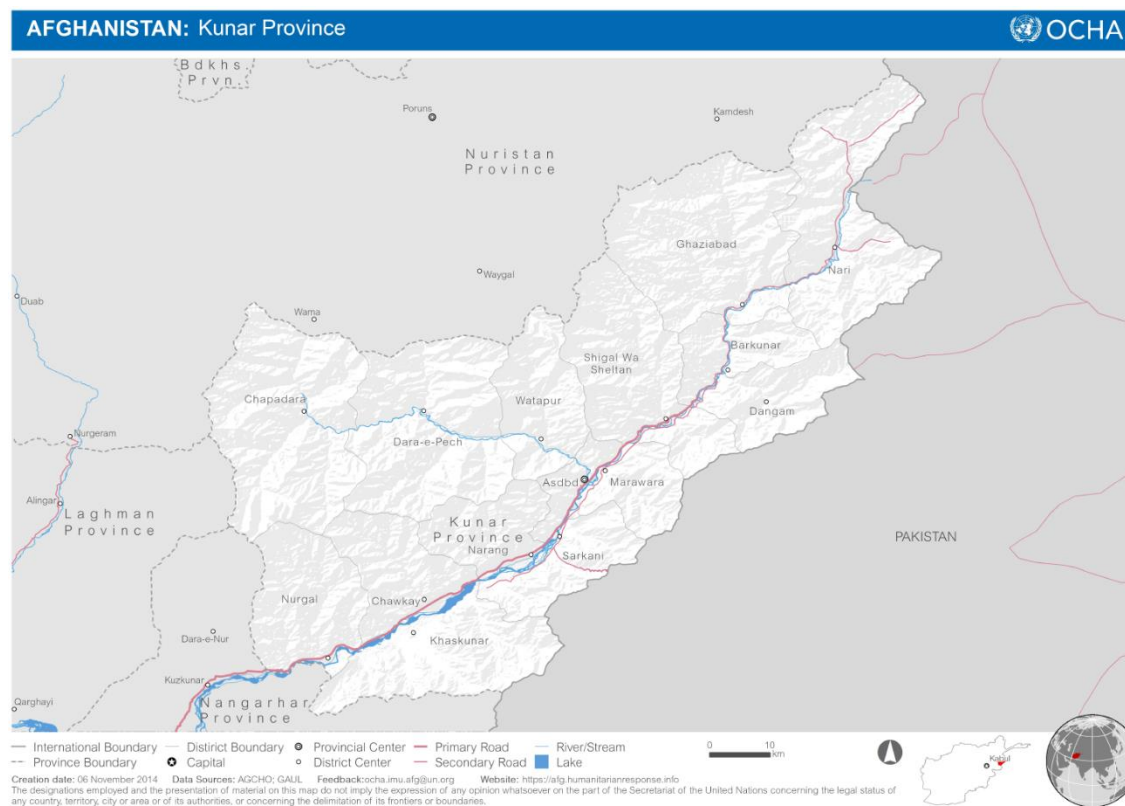
²⁵⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 5 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 5 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January to 2 February 2020), 3 February 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 April – 4 May 2020), 7 May 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (24 – 30 August 2020), 2 September 2020, [url](#)

2.19 Kunar

2.19.1 General description of the province



Map 19: Afghanistan – Kunar province, source: UNOCHA²⁵⁵⁸

Kunar is located in eastern Afghanistan²⁵⁵⁹ and is divided into the following districts: Asadabad, Barkunur (also Asmar), Chapadara, Chawkay (also Sawkay), Dangam, Dara-e Pech (also Manogi), Ghaziabad, Khashkunur, Marawara, Narang (also Narang Wa Badil), Nari, Nurgal, Sarkani, Shigal, Watapur and Sheltan.²⁵⁶⁰ AAN defined the latter as a ‘temporary district’, meaning that it is considered to belong to Kunar province, but its status as such has not been approved by the Afghan parliament yet.²⁵⁶¹ The provincial capital is Asadabad.²⁵⁶²

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 490 690.²⁵⁶³

Kunar is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Pashai and Nuristani.²⁵⁶⁴

²⁵⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁹ US Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁰ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Kunar, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 24; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁵⁶¹ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁵⁶² US Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunar, n. d., [url](#)

²⁵⁶³ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

²⁵⁶⁴ US Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunar, n. d., [url](#)

There is no functioning airstrip in Kunar.²⁵⁶⁵ The national highway 'NH01' starts from Jalalabad, passes through the districts of Nurgal, Chawkay, Narang, Asadabad, Shigal and leads to Asmar.²⁵⁶⁶ From Asmar, the highway leads to Nuristan province through Ghaziabad and Nari districts. Blocked in 2017 by insurgents, it was reopened by ANDSF in August 2018 after a series of operations.²⁵⁶⁷ According to an Afghan soldier interviewed by French newspaper Libération, the government also retook control of the road leading to Chapadara district through Dara-e Pech, formerly known as a 'death trap', in early 2019.²⁵⁶⁸ In September 2019, it was reported that after five years of closure, the Nawapas Highway, which is located in Sarkani district and crosses into Pakistan at the unofficial Nawapas border point, had been cleared from the Taliban presence.²⁵⁶⁹ However, in September 2019, UNOCHA reported that militant groups were blocking unspecified highways in Kunar.²⁵⁷⁰ The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) published information on its website in November 2020 claiming the construction of 35 kilometers road in 22 villages of Shigal district.²⁵⁷¹

2.19.2 Conflict background and actors in Kunar

In February 2020, a security analyst interviewed by Sweden's Lifos described Kunar as 'strongly controlled/influenced' by the Taliban.²⁵⁷² As of May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mawalawi Hamdullah Uruzgani, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the Taliban shadow governor of Kunar. He was appointed after the 'reshuffle' of the Taliban government structure during the 2019-2020 winter, ahead of the 2020 fighting season.²⁵⁷³ By December 2019, according to the provincial vice-governor, about 1 000 militants, most of them former members of the Taliban, had reportedly enrolled in a NDS-sponsored 'Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration' program in Kunar.²⁵⁷⁴ According to LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted in April and May 2021, Chapadara district is assessed as 'under the Taliban control' and most of the other districts as 'contested'.²⁵⁷⁵

A survey of Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021 designated 71.63 % of the Kunar province under the government control, 25.25 % under the Taliban control and 3.13 % controlled by neither side. According to the same survey, 357 690 of people lived in areas under the government control, 126 097 under the Taliban control and 15 606 in areas controlled by neither side.²⁵⁷⁶

As of May 2020, Kunar was one of the 12 provinces where Al Qaeda was said to be 'covertly active'. The UN Security Council mentioned in the same report that the group intended to form a joint unit of 2 000 fighters with the Haqqani Network, headed by Shir Khan Manga in the operational zone

²⁵⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020 (December 2019), 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 11

²⁵⁶⁶ Italy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Evaluation Report - Afghanistan: Rehabilitation of Maidan Shar – Bamyan Road, 2014, [url](#), p. 8; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁷ Salaam Times, Afghan forces reopen key Kunar highway blocked by Taliban, 9 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁸ Libération, Afghanistan: mon voisin, ce taliban devenu fréquentable [Afghanistan : my neighbour, this Taliban guy who has become reputable], 3 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunar's Nawapas road reopens after 5-year closure, 7 September 2019, [url](#); Sabawoon, A. M., The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 – 29 September 2019), 2 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁷¹ Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, SCA inaugurates pipe scheme and road construction projects in Shigal district of Kunar province, 25 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁷² Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (version 2.0.), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 41

²⁵⁷³ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9, 27

²⁵⁷⁴ Le Figaro, Afghanistan: un programme gouvernemental pour réintégrer des talibans repentis [Afghanistan : a government program to reinstate repentant Taliban], 26 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁷⁵ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

²⁵⁷⁶ Pajhwok, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

composed of Kunar and Nuristan.²⁵⁷⁷ UNAMA added that Al Qaeda's main tasks consist in 'training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring'.²⁵⁷⁸ Besides, in March 2020, Kunar officials expressed concern about the recruitment by Al Qaeda of former Taliban fighters hostile to the negotiations between the movement and the USA.²⁵⁷⁹ Long War Journal also mentioned the presence in Kunar and Nuristan provinces of a commander affiliated to both the Taliban and Al Qaeda, Qari Zia Rahman.²⁵⁸⁰ According to Shamshad TV report, quoted by LWJ in April 2021, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jamiat-i Ahrar, Al Qaeda and ISKP are, as well as the Taliban, active in the Kunar province. Moreover, LWJ adds that analyses of the Al Qaeda own newsletters, show that this group and its allies were involved in attacks between July 2020 and April 2021 in many provinces including Kunar.²⁵⁸¹

As of July 2020, the Afghan branch of the Islamic State, ISKP, was said to be headed by Sheikh Matiullah Kamahwal, former leader of the Kunar chapter of the ISKP.²⁵⁸² During the first half of 2019, ISKP appeared to gain territory in the province²⁵⁸³, which had already been described as one of its strongholds in Afghanistan in February 2019.²⁵⁸⁴ However, from the fall of 2019, military operations simultaneously led by ANDSF, coalition forces and the Taliban pressured ISKP into leaving the areas under its control in southern Nangarhar and in Kunar.²⁵⁸⁵ Although the group endured further losses in Kunar in early 2020²⁵⁸⁶, the UN Secretary-General stated that the province had 'effectively become the group's new Afghan core areas'.²⁵⁸⁷ Between January and May 2020, sources reported the presence of ISKP fighters or bases in western parts of the province: in remote areas of Chawkay district, where the dense forests provide quality hideouts²⁵⁸⁸, in Narang, Nurgal and Chapadara²⁵⁸⁹, as well as in Watapur and Dara-e Pech districts.²⁵⁹⁰ Estimates of the total number of ISKP fighters in Kunar oscillated between 400 (half of them in Chapadara), as reported by the Diplomat in August 2019,²⁵⁹¹ 1 200, according to the provincial governor in January 2020²⁵⁹², and 2 100, as stated by the UN Secretary-General in February 2020.²⁵⁹³ Local ISKP ranks were bolstered by the arrival of about

²⁵⁷⁷ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 12-13

²⁵⁷⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 85-86

²⁵⁷⁹ Tolonews, Al-Qaeda Recruiting Disaffected Taliban: Kunar Officials, 12 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁸⁰ LWJ, Female Pakistani Taliban suicide bomber hits hospital, 21 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁸¹ LWJ, Analysis: Al Qaeda continues to operate throughout Afghanistan, 8 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁸² UN Security Council, Twenty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/717, 23 July 2020, 23 July 2020, [url](#), p. 15

²⁵⁸³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Islamic State In Afghanistan Growing Bigger, More Dangerous, 22 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁸⁴ UN Security Council, Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 1 February 2019, [url](#), p. 7

²⁵⁸⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security & Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 28

²⁵⁸⁶ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 3

²⁵⁸⁷ UN Security Council, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2020/95, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7

²⁵⁸⁸ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 18

²⁵⁸⁹ Tolonews, More Than 1,000 Daesh Fighters Active In Kunar: Governor, 8 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁰ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁹¹ Diplomat (The), The Peculiar Presence of the Islamic State in Kunar, 14 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁹² Tolonews, More Than 1,000 Daesh Fighters Active In Kunar: Governor, 8 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁹³ UN Security Council, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, S/2020/95, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7

350 fighters – including foreign nationals – pushed out of neighbouring Nangarhar by ANDSF and Taliban operations.²⁵⁹⁴

In an article published by the magazine *The Diplomat*, Afghanistan-based journalist Franz J. Marty noted that, according to ‘anecdotal evidence’, ‘some alleged Islamic State fighters in Kunar have simply adopted a vague, locally-colored version of the Islamic State’, sometimes for opportunistic reasons or ideological compatibility, since many Kunar residents are Salafists.²⁵⁹⁵ In this regard, in January 2020, *Foreign Policy* reported that in both Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, some Salafist *madrasas*, funded by Gulf states-based NGOs, were supporting ISKP activities.²⁵⁹⁶ In March 2021, Afghanistan Analyst Network’s Obaid Ali and Khalid Gharanai confirmed there is ‘no open ISKP presence’ in the province even if some activities like targeted killings were attributed to ISKP in Sarkani, Dara-e-Pech and Nurgal districts. The group’s leaders, including Afghan and foreign ones who fled Nangarhar to Kunar, were killed, arrested and fewer disappeared.²⁵⁹⁷

According to the Indian Newspaper *Hindustan Times* in June 2019, approximately 500 Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LeT) fighters were active in Kunar and Nangarhar.²⁵⁹⁸ As of May 2020, LeT fighters were ‘dispersed within Taliban forces’.²⁵⁹⁹ Another active group is Jaish-e Mohammed (JeM). As LeT, it is said to help terrorist fighters to enter Afghanistan and to carry out targeted assassinations, notably against government officials.²⁶⁰⁰ Up to 2018 at least, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) ran a military base, called Ghazi Camp, in Kunar.²⁶⁰¹ It reportedly numbered 500 fighters in the province as of May 2020.²⁶⁰² Finally, as of July 2020, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) was supposedly present in Afghanistan, mainly in three provinces, among which Kunar.²⁶⁰³

In April 2020, RFE/RL’s Gandhara reported that the Taliban and other AGEs controlled ‘large swathes of rural territories’ in Kunar province.²⁶⁰⁴

Moreover, various districts of Kunar were targeted many times during the reporting period by Pakistani forces intending to establish checkpoints inside Afghan territory and backing AGEs in Kunar.²⁶⁰⁵

²⁵⁹⁴ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 17

²⁵⁹⁵ *Diplomat* (The), The Peculiar Presence of the Islamic State in Kunar, 14 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁶ FP, In Afghanistan, Religious Schools Are a Breeding Ground for Islamic State Influence, 24 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁷ Ali, O., Hit from sides (2): The demise of ISKP in Kunar, AAN, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁸ *Hindustan Times*, LeT plays major role in providing recruits, funding to Taliban: UN report, 24 June 2019, [url](#); Atlantic Council, A divided Taliban could unleash a new proxy war in Afghanistan, 29 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁹ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 78

²⁶⁰⁰ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 78

²⁶⁰¹ LWJ, US hits Pakistani Taliban training camp in eastern Afghanistan, 8 March 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁰² UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 20

²⁶⁰³ UN Security Council, Twenty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/717, 23 July 2020, 23 July 2020, [url](#), p. 16

²⁶⁰⁴ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Precious Stones Illegally Mined In Afghan Province, 24 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁰⁵ Tolonews, 8 Civilians Killed in Pakistani Mortar Attack on Kunar: Officials, 16 July 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghanistan condemns cross-border rocket firing by Pakistan, 16 July 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Pakistani rockets kill a child in Kunar, 19 October 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Pak-Army shellings on Kunar draw Karzai’s ire, 3 February 2021, [url](#)

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Kunar province decreased by 39 %.²⁶⁰⁶

In terms of presence of government security forces, Kunar province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under the Train, Advise, and Assist Command – East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.²⁶⁰⁷ According to AAN, Kunar is often listed as one of the provinces where the ALP is working well. Indeed, whereas it was one of the most violent provinces, the ALP and other ANDSF corps were able to stabilise the situation after the withdrawal of international forces.²⁶⁰⁸ In October 2020, the Governor's Office encouraged construction companies to recruit former ALP officers to protect road construction in the province.²⁶⁰⁹

2.19.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 170 civilian casualties (28 killed and 142 injured) in Kunar in ground engagements (leading cause), non-suicide IEDs and UXO/landmines. This represents a decrease of 34% compared to 2019.²⁶¹⁰ According to SIGAR, Resolute Support (RS) recorded more than 25 civilian casualties in Kunar province during the first,²⁶¹¹ and less than 25 civilians during the second quarter of 2020.²⁶¹² No RS information on civilian casualties per province was available for the second half of 2020 in SIGAR quarterly reports.²⁶¹³

From 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data on 171 violent events in Kunar province from open sources: 113 coded as 'battles', 52 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 6 as 'violence against civilians'.²⁶¹⁴

²⁶⁰⁶ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²⁶⁰⁷ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

²⁶⁰⁸ Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN and GPPI, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 46, 93

²⁶⁰⁹ Salaam Times, Disbanded Local Police to get priority in job market after years of fighting, 22 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁶¹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

²⁶¹¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

²⁶¹² SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

²⁶¹³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁶¹⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Bamyan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

EVENT_TYPE ● Battles ● Explosions/Remote violence ● Violence against civilians

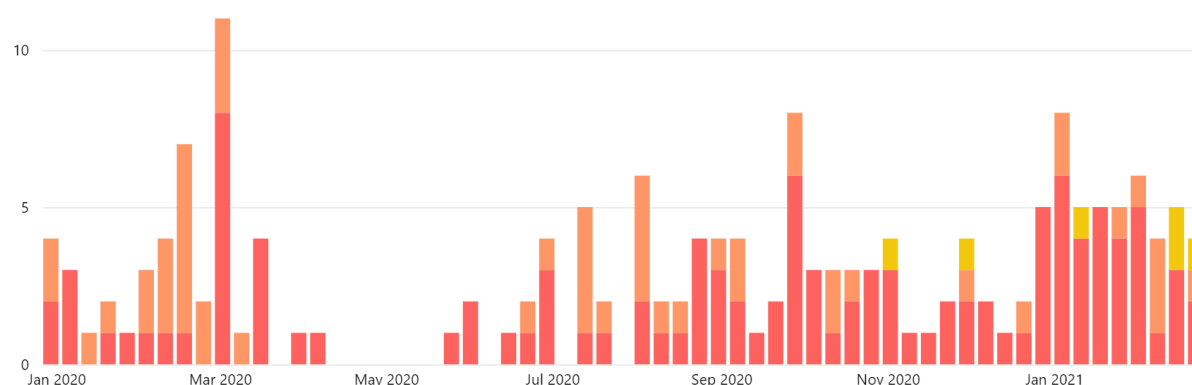


Figure 38: Bamiyan province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²⁶¹⁵

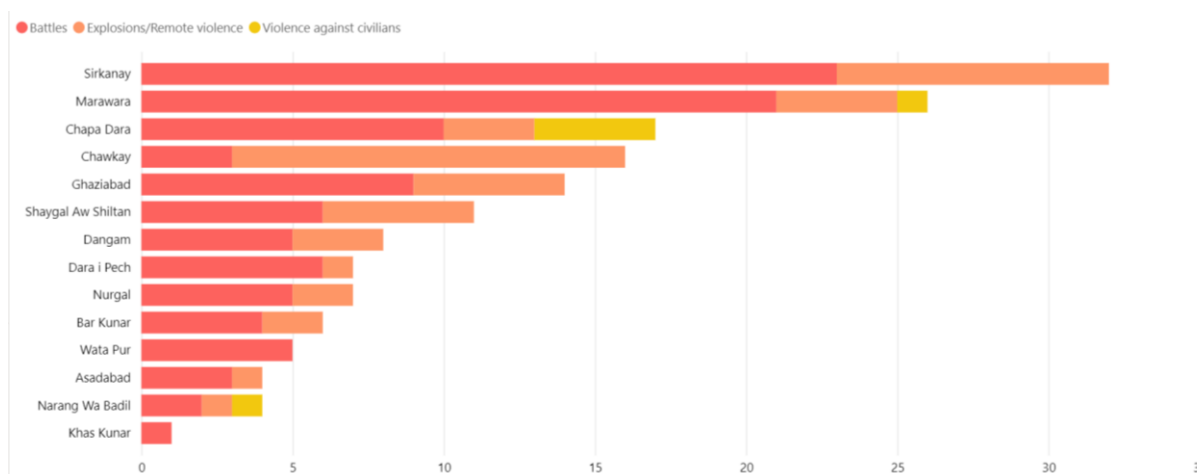


Figure 39: Kunar province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²⁶¹⁶

The category “battles” concerned mainly armed clashes between Afghan security forces and the Taliban, while the category “explosions/remote violence” concerned mainly remote explosive/landmine/IED, followed by shelling/artillery/missile attacks. On 22 June 2020, at least 8 civilians were killed and 4 wounded by a suicide attack led by UAG in Chawkay district.²⁶¹⁷

In March 2020, the Taliban claimed to have cleared the whole province of ISKP, although US military sources stated that ANDSF and coalition forces had also contributed to ISKP defeat.²⁶¹⁸ According to French newspaper Le Figaro, Afghan official sources denied that ANDSF and the Taliban had led joint military operations against ISKP. However, the ANDSF are thought to have toned down their attacks

²⁶¹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Bamiyan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁶¹⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kunar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#) ; 13 incidents (10 battles and 3 remote violence) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

²⁶¹⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kunar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁶¹⁸ VOA, US Admits Taliban Offensive Is Whittling IS's Grip on Afghanistan, 20 March 2020, [url](#)

on the Taliban, allowing both of them to focus on the fighting against their common enemy.²⁶¹⁹ In early 2020, several raids were conducted against ISKP in Chawkay and Nurgal districts.²⁶²⁰

In March and April 2020, the Taliban abducted and held captive seven health workers overall, in Chapadara and Marawara districts, reportedly accusing them of failing to provide adequate services to the local population.²⁶²¹ Early in 2021, they killed five police officers in Chapa Dara district.²⁶²²

In March 2020, the security forces reportedly arrested – then released – a journalist for having questioned the management of funds allocated to the COVID-19 response.²⁶²³

During the reporting period, military personnel and civilians including women and children were killed and wounded in various districts of Kunar in repeated firefights between Afghan and Pakistani forces disputing the common border. Houses and livestock were damaged. Afghan security forces accuse Pakistani army to try to establish check posts inside Kunar territory.²⁶²⁴

In February 2021, three civilians were killed and two others injured in three separate blasts in Kunar on a same day.²⁶²⁵

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 19 622 persons displaced from Kunar, of which 15 162 were displaced within the province. Among them 13 680 were displaced during the first quarter of 2020. During the reporting period, 4 282 persons were displaced from Kunar province to Nangarhar province, and 178 to Nuristan province²⁶²⁶

The heavy displacement waves in the first quarter of 2020 were linked to the Taliban offensive in Kunar on the eve of the agreement between the group and the US²⁶²⁷, as well as to ANDSF operations against ISKP in Chawkay and Nurgal.²⁶²⁸

²⁶¹⁹ Le Figaro, Afghanistan: à Taranak, l'alliance secrète des talibans et de l'armée contre l'État islamique [In Taranak, the Taliban and the army's secret alliance against the Islamic State], 31 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁶²⁰ Khaama Press, 19 ISIS militants killed in Afghan Special Forces raid, airstrikes in Kapisa and Kunar, 21 February 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Airstrikes, Special Forces raid kill 6 ISIS militants in East of Afghanistan, 18 February 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, U.S. airstrike kills 7 ISIS militants in Kunar province of Afghanistan, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁶²¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Special Report: Attacks on Healthcare during the COVID-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²⁶²² RFE/RL/Gandhara, Five Police Officers Killed, 12 Wounded In Afghanistan Attacks, Officials Say, 13 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁶²³ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General, A/74/897-S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²⁶²⁴ Tolonews, 8 Civilians Killed in Pakistani Mortar Attack on Kunar: Officials, 16 July 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghanistan condemns cross-border rocket firing by Pakistan, 16 July 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Pakistani rockets kill a child in Kunar, 19 October 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Pak-Army shellings on Kunar draw Karzai's ire, 3 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁶²⁵ Reuters, U.N. convoy in Afghanistan attacked by gunmen, five Afghan security force members killed, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

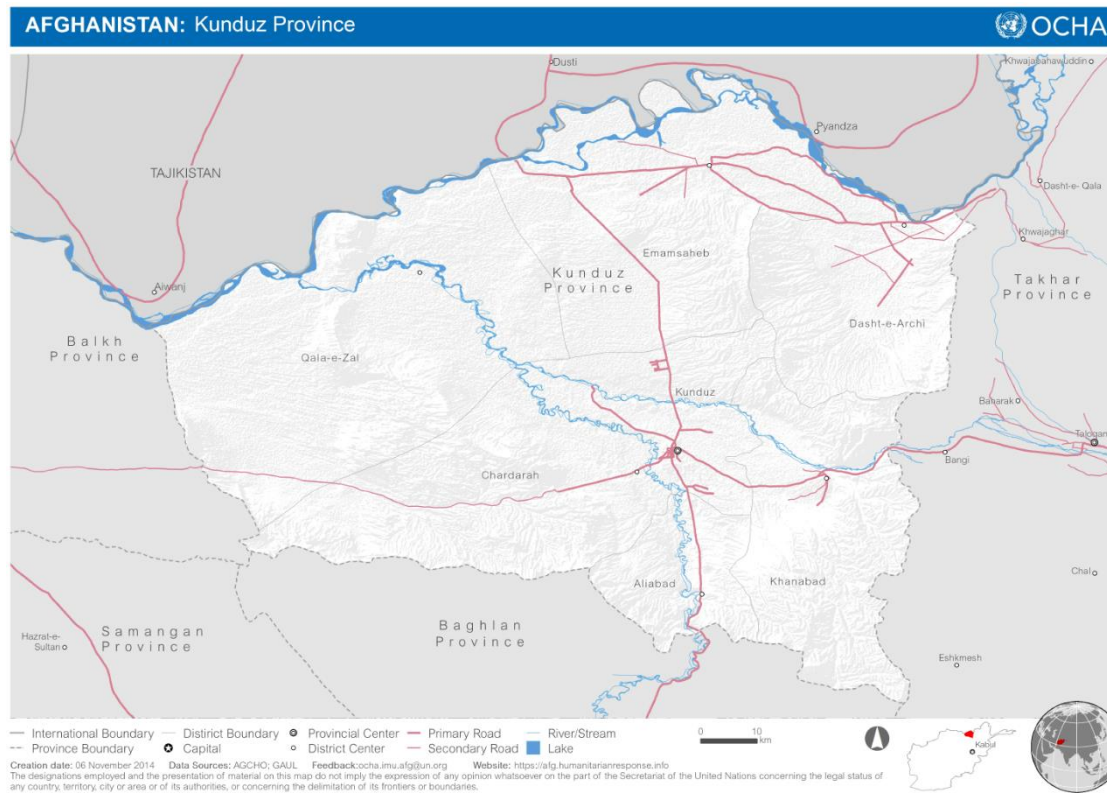
²⁶²⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 4 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁶²⁷ IDMC, Internal displacement 2020: Mid-year update, 29 September 2020, [url](#), p.32

²⁶²⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (2 March - 8 March 2020), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

2.20 Kunduz

2.20.1 General description of the province



Map 20: Afghanistan – Kunduz province, source: UNOCHA²⁶²⁹

Kunduz province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Takhar province to the east, Baghlan province to the south, Balkh province to the west and an international border with Tajikistan to the north.²⁶³⁰ Kunduz province is divided into the following administrative units: Aliabad, Chardarah, Dasht-e Archi, Emamsaheb, Khanabad, Kunduz and Qala-i Zal.²⁶³¹ Gulbad, Gultepa and Aqtash are more recently established districts, and are described as ‘temporary’ by NSIA. The provincial capital is Kunduz city.²⁶³²

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1 113 676, of which 356 536 live in the provincial capital, Kunduz.²⁶³³ The main ethnic group in the province are Pashtuns. Other ethnic groups present include Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Turkmen and Pashai²⁶³⁴ as well as Qazaks, Aymaqs, Arabs, Gujars, Baluchs and Nuristani.²⁶³⁵

Kunduz province has always been a strategic crossing-point. Being close to Tajikistan, it hosted the Tajikistan Islamic opposition during the Tajik civil war in the 1990s and it provided access to the main smuggling routes to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Moreover, located near a main road to Kabul, it

²⁶²⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁶³⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁶³¹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, November 2019, [url](#), p. 29

²⁶³² Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunduz, 1 February 2017, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, November 2019, [url](#), p. 25; Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Kunduz, 2020, [url](#)

²⁶³³ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 25

²⁶³⁴ US Naval Postgraduate School, Kunduz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁶³⁵ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunduz, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

connects the rest of Afghanistan with its northern region.²⁶³⁶ A section of Asian Highway AH7 from Kabul connects the national capital with Kunduz province and the border crossing to Tajikistan at the port of Sher Khan (also Sher Khan Bandar).²⁶³⁷ The Kunduz-Takhar Highway passes through the district of Khanabad and connects the province with Takhar and Badakhshan.²⁶³⁸

The inauguration of a new terminal with a capacity of 1 300 passengers at Kunduz airport was announced in February 2017.²⁶³⁹ On 29 September 2019, 'local officials' of Kunduz announced that domestic flights to and from Kabul had resumed from Kunduz airport.²⁶⁴⁰ However, there was no information available on scheduled flights as of February 2021.²⁶⁴¹

2.20.2 Conflict background and actors in Kunduz

The security situation of Kunduz province has purportedly been deteriorating over recent years.²⁶⁴² Kunduz was the last Taliban stronghold before the Taliban's fall in 2001, when it was freed by US led security forces.²⁶⁴³ According to Human Rights Watch, the Taliban 're-emerged as a significant force in Kunduz province around 2008' and were more lenient in enforcing social restrictions, however, that changed as their control over Kunduz grew, and they began gradually implementing 'successive waves of restrictions on local communities in proportion to their level of control and the community's capacity to resist', punishing acts that they believed were prohibited by *sharia* law.²⁶⁴⁴ Kunduz city temporarily fell to the Taliban in September 2015²⁶⁴⁵, and they almost recaptured it in October 2016 by encircling the city and cutting off the main supply and reinforcement routes.²⁶⁴⁶ After these attempts by the Taliban to capture Kunduz City, the Afghan security forces tried to regain control over the districts of Dasht-e Archi, Qala-i Zal, Emamsaheb and parts of Khanabad, which served as strategic strongholds for the Taliban offensive. The operations took long and control over the districts changed hands a few times, purportedly contributing to instability in the province.²⁶⁴⁷ In 2017, renewed attempts by the Taliban to get closer to the provincial capital through attacking nearby Dasht-e Archi took place, but these were repelled by Afghan security forces.²⁶⁴⁸ According to an assessment published by the German NGO Johanniter International Assistance, in November 2019 some 80 % of Kunduz province, in particular the rural areas, was under Taliban control, while most district administrative centres were under control of the security forces.²⁶⁴⁹ In January 2020, an Afghanistan analyst contacted by the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) stated that Kunduz and Baghlan were believed, at that time, to be the most Taliban-controlled or influenced province in the north-eastern region.²⁶⁵⁰ In August 2020, the Taliban launched a new offensive on

²⁶³⁶ DW, Kunduz violence could destabilize neighbors, 30 September 2015, [url](#)

²⁶³⁷ UNESCAP, Asian Highway Route Map, 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Tajikistan/Afghanistan: Road Bridge Opens With Aim Of Strengthening Trade, 26 August 2007, [url](#)

²⁶³⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Ali, O., The Taliban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, [url](#)

²⁶³⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz airport gets new terminal worth \$1.4m, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

²⁶⁴⁰ Xinhua, Domestic flights resumed to Afghanistan's northern Kunduz province, 29 September 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Kabul-Kunduz Flights Resumed After 10 Years, 29 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁴¹ Flightradar24, UND/OAUZ Kunduz Afghanistan – Routes, n.d., [url](#); KamAir, Route Map, n.d., [url](#)

²⁶⁴² Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 47; Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁴³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

²⁶⁴⁴ HRW, "You Have No Right to Complain:" Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 45, 46

²⁶⁴⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

²⁶⁴⁶ Ali, O., The Taliban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, [url](#)

²⁶⁴⁷ Ali, O., The Taliban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, [url](#)

²⁶⁴⁸ Ali, O., New Taliban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordination, still well placed to threaten the city, AAN, 9 July 2017, [url](#); Tolonews, Dozens of Afghan Forces Killed In North, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁴⁹ JUH and JACK, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Kunduz Province, November 2019, [url](#), pp. 14-15; 20

²⁶⁵⁰ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 48

‘strategic’ Kunduz city, in what was described as ‘the worst offensive’ by the Taliban in Kunduz since 2015.²⁶⁵¹ While Afghan security forces eventually defended the city, pushing back the Taliban, ‘the area remained under pressure’.²⁶⁵²

An October 2020 AAN report stated that the Taliban were, at the time, ‘infiltrating’ the outskirts of Kunduz city, and were in control of ‘district centres of Chahar Dara, Dasht-e Archi and Qala-ye Zal’, as well as putting pressure on Khanabad, Aliabad and Imam Saheb districts. Moreover, the Taliban reportedly had a significant level of control in the province’s three new sub-districts of Gulbad, Gultepa and Aqtash.²⁶⁵³ According to the same source, one of the factors that lead to the Taliban’s increase in control of the province was the defensive stance adopted by the Afghan government following the 29 February 2020 Doha agreement, which was not mirrored by the Taliban, who ‘went back on the offensive immediately’ after the agreement was concluded.²⁶⁵⁴

More recently, a January 2021 AAN report detailed the working of the ‘shadow’ institutions of the Taliban in Dasht-e Archi district. According to the source, ‘the Taleban governance system in Kunduz mirrors that of the government and is fully functioning in Dasht-e Archi district, which also serves as a major Taleban organisational hub’. Moreover, the Taliban are ‘involved in district appointments’, operate ‘primary, secondary and high courts’, while ‘a Taliban “bureaucracy” is functioning, with active components including military, judicial and finance committees’.²⁶⁵⁵ In addition, ‘the Taleban collect “taxes” on most economic activities in Dasht-e Archi, including on agriculture, livestock, construction and other development projects and from shopkeepers, and business owners’.²⁶⁵⁶

As of February and May 2021, an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Dasht-e Archi, Khanabad and Qala-i Zal districts as ‘Taliban-controlled’ and the remaining districts in Kunduz province as ‘contested’.²⁶⁵⁷ At the same time, a survey by Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021²⁶⁵⁸ designated 20.5 % of territory of Kunduz under government control, 74.5 % under Taliban control, and 5 % controlled by neither side. According to the same survey, 233 019 of Kunduz’s inhabitants lived in areas under government control, 846 824 of the province’s population lived in areas under Taliban control and 56 834 of Kunduz’s residents lived in areas controlled by neither side.²⁶⁵⁹

According to an April 2018 report by the Jamestown Foundation, ISKP (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan Province) set up bases in the northern provinces of Afghanistan, including in Kunduz.²⁶⁶⁰ A June 2019 New York Times article noted that ISKP cells had recently appeared in Kunduz province.²⁶⁶¹ The Afghan Ministry of Interior claimed to have arrested an ISKP leader in Emamsaheb district in July 2019, accusing him of recruiting in Kunduz.²⁶⁶² The presence of active

²⁶⁵¹ Reuters, Fight and talk: Facing negotiations, Taliban almost took key Afghan city, 14 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁵² Reuters, Fight and talk: Facing negotiations, Taliban almost took key Afghan city, 14 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁵³ Quilty, A., Taleban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan conflict has changed since the Doha agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁵⁴ Quilty, A., Taleban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan conflict has changed since the Doha agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁵⁵ AAN, Living with the Taleban (3): Local experiences in Dasht-e Archi district, Kunduz province, 12 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁵⁶ AAN, Living with the Taleban (3): Local experiences in Dasht-e Archi district, Kunduz province, 12 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁵⁷ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

²⁶⁵⁸ For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephone interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country; Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁵⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁶⁰ Jamestown Foundation (The), Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, 6 April 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁶¹ New York Times (The), U.S. Special Forces Battle Against ISIS Turns to Containment, and Concern, 14 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁶² Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces arrest top ISIS leader in Kunduz province, 7 July 2019, [url](#)

ISKP cells in Kunduz was also mentioned on Twitter in August and October 2019²⁶⁶³, while an attack on a checkpoint on the border between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in November 2019 was attributed to ISKP by Tajik officials²⁶⁶⁴, although not claimed by the movement itself. The attackers were said to have entered Tajikistan from Kunduz province, through Qala-I Zal district, which is said to be almost under complete Taliban control. According to the Qala-I Zal district governor an ISKP commander had been recruiting fighters in the district.²⁶⁶⁵ A May 2020 report by RFE/RL (Gandhara) highlighted that, while the ISKP presence in Afghanistan had been weakened, arrests at that time of ISKP members 'in major urban areas' were an indication of the existence of ISKP 'sleeper cells' in the country.²⁶⁶⁶ During the reference period, no violent events were attributed to ISKP by ACLED in Kunduz province.²⁶⁶⁷

In May 2020, the UN highlighted reports that 'Al-Qaida and the Taliban held meetings over the course of 2019 and in early 2020 to discuss cooperation related to operational planning, training and the provision by the Taliban of safe havens for Al-Qaida members inside Afghanistan'. The same source claimed that Al-Qaida was 'covertly active' in 12 Afghan provinces, including in Kunduz.²⁶⁶⁸ More recently, in January 2021, the UN again confirmed the presence of 'Al-Qaida and its affiliates' in several provinces, including Kunduz.²⁶⁶⁹

In the past, Kunduz province has hosted foreign fighters from Central Asia, such as members of the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which were purportedly active along the 'porous' Afghan-Tajik border.²⁶⁷⁰ Besides Uzbek and Tajik militants, fighters coming from Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Chechnya were also reported to have been active in the province.²⁶⁷¹ Moreover, an insurgent group called Jabha-ye Qariha ('the front of those who have memorised the Quran by heart', the *qaris*), which is known as the military wing of Jundullah, is purportedly active in Dasht-e Archi district. Although Jundullah is an independent group, it has fought alongside the Taliban even if the two insurgent groups have different beliefs.²⁶⁷²

In January 2020, the UN reported the presence of some 400 'foreign terrorist fighters from China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan' in the north-eastern provinces of Afghanistan, including in Kunduz. The UN stated at that time that operations by the Afghan security forces had caused the foreign fighters to 'break into small groups' and retreat to other provinces.²⁶⁷³ In its May and July 2020

²⁶⁶³ Dr. Drexluddin Khan Spiveyzai Kayani (Drexy Baba) (@RisboLensky), [Twitter], posted on: 19 October 2019, [url](#);

Dr. Drexluddin Khan Spiveyzai Kayani (Drexy Baba) (@RisboLensky), posted on: 6 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁶⁴ Asia Plus, Tajik security forces launch operation to hunt alleged terrorists who turn out to be ... ordinary hunters, 11 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁶⁵ New York Times (The), ISIS Fighters Attack Outpost in Tajikistan, 6 November 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Reported Attack In Tajikistan Could Have Broad Implications For Central Asia, 6 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁶⁶ RFE/RL/Gandhara, The Taliban, The Government, And Islamic State: Who Controls What In Afghanistan?, 31 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁶⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kunduz province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁶⁸ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 33

²⁶⁶⁹ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), para. 64

²⁶⁷⁰ DW, Kunduz violence could destabilize neighbors, 30 September 2015, [url](#)

²⁶⁷¹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

²⁶⁷² Ali, O., One Land, Two Rules (3): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Dasht-e Archi district in Kunduz province, AAN, 26 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁷³ UN Security Council, Twenty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/53, 20 January 2020, [url](#), para. 57

reports, the UN also confirmed the presence of IMU and ETIM in Kunduz.²⁶⁷⁴ In January 2021, the same source stated that the IJG (IJU) had ‘approximately 100 fighters active in the Afghan northern provinces of Kunduz and Faryab under Taliban shelter and control’.²⁶⁷⁵

According to the 2020 UNODC opium survey, Kunduz province remained poppy-free as in the previous year.²⁶⁷⁶ Kunduz province has been mentioned as a transit point for drug smuggling, particularly heroin, into Tajikistan.²⁶⁷⁷

In terms of the presence of government security forces, a July 2019 SIGAR report stated that Kunduz province was at that time under the responsibility of the 217th ANA corps. ANA’s 20th Division, previously under the ANA 209th Corps, was reassigned in April 2019 to become a new corps, the 217th Corps.²⁶⁷⁸ The 217th Corps has its headquarters in Kunduz.²⁶⁷⁹ ANA’s battalion headquarters are located in the south of Kunduz city, in the vicinity of Kunduz airport, with ‘smaller ALP and ANA satellite outposts’ nearby.²⁶⁸⁰ With regards to former members of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) in Kunduz province, a 2021 AAN report stated that, after the disbandment of the ALP, these were largely ‘recruited only into the ANP, with no transfers to the ANA-TF’, while some were dismissed. The effect of disbanding the ALP in Kunduz was disputed, as some sources quoted in the report claimed that the Taliban had taken over vacant checkpoints left by the ALP, while other sources stated that the ‘ALP-turned-ANP’ still ‘operated where they had previously’.²⁶⁸¹

As of February 2021, Kunduz province was still included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan.²⁶⁸²

2.20.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 444 civilian casualties (194 killed, 250 injured) in Kunduz province, a 11 % decrease compared to 2019, when 492 civilian casualties (141 killed and 351 injured) were recorded. In 2020, the leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by airstrikes and non-suicide IEDs; meanwhile in 2019, the leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by non-suicide IEDs and airstrikes.²⁶⁸³

²⁶⁷⁴ UN Security Council, Twenty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/717, 23 July 2020, 23 July 2020, [url](#), para. 67; UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), paras. 85, 88

²⁶⁷⁵ Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), para. 66

²⁶⁷⁶ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey, 3 May 2021, [url](#), p. 9; UNODC, Afghanistan opium survey 2019, 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 12

²⁶⁷⁷ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 49

²⁶⁷⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 78

²⁶⁷⁹ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, Report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019, 16 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

²⁶⁸⁰ Quilty, A, Taliban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan conflict has changed since the Doha agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁸¹ AAN, Disbanding the ALP – An Update: Major transition of security forces achieved during wartime, but at a cost, 15 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁸² NATO, Resolute Support: Train Advise Assist Command – North, accessed 22 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁸³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 11, 110; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, February 2020, [url](#), pp. 5, 103

Between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data on 472 violent events in Kunduz province, of which 346 were coded as battles, 111 were coded as explosions/remote violence, 14 were coded as violence against civilians and one incident was a riot against a radio station.²⁶⁸⁴

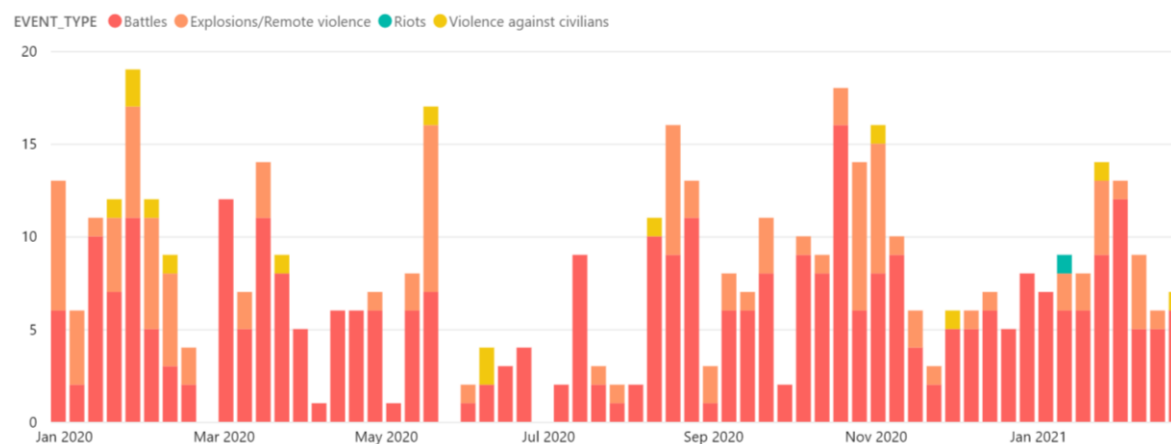


Figure 40: Kunduz province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²⁶⁸⁵

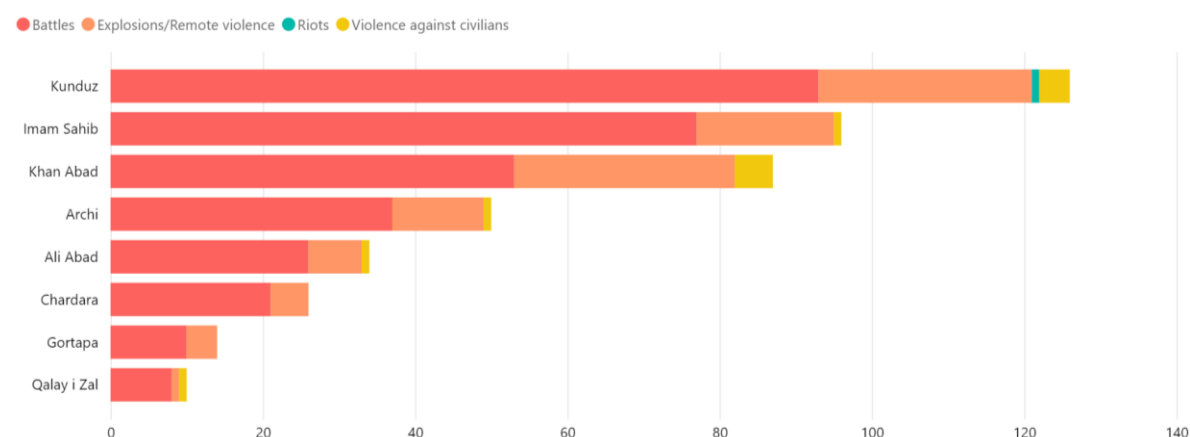


Figure 41: Kunduz province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²⁶⁸⁶

Of the battles, 327 events involved armed clashes, while the remaining concerned change in control over territory. The majority of those armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police or military personnel, and members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis* (the term *arbaki* is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the

²⁶⁸⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kunduz province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁸⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kunduz province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁸⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kunduz province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 29 incidents (21 battles, 7 remote violence and 1 violence against civilians) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias),²⁶⁸⁷ as well as on NATO troops.²⁶⁸⁸ On 16 January 2020, the Taliban attacked a police checkpoint, killing 11 police officers, while on 29 January 2020 another 13 Afghan security officers were killed in a second attack.²⁶⁸⁹ Meanwhile, between 20 and 26 January 2020, fighting had reportedly blocked road movements from Kunduz to Baghlan province.²⁶⁹⁰ Between 10 and 16 February 2020, ‘roads connecting Kunduz to Pul-e-Khumri and Kunduz to Taloqan’ were unsafe due to ongoing fighting.²⁶⁹¹ On 19 May 2020, the Taliban launched a night attack on ‘at least 17 security posts’ around Kunduz city.²⁶⁹² During 29 June – 5 July 2020, fighting was reported in the Khanabad area, and ‘severely restricted the humanitarian traffic between the provincial capital cities of Kunduz and Taloqan’.²⁶⁹³

In August 2020, the Taliban launched a new offensive on ‘strategic’ Kunduz city, firstly gaining control on rural areas around the city, then attacking it between 20–26 August 2020, after ‘seizing several checkpoints and two bases on arterial roads into the city’.²⁶⁹⁴ At the same time, it was reported that on 24 August 2020, Afghan security forces launched an ‘air and ground operation’ against the Taliban, and ‘the highway between the northern Kunduz and Khanabad districts’ was blocked.²⁶⁹⁵ Elsewhere, between 16–27 August 2020, conflict was also reported in ‘several villages of Khanabad district (along the Kunduz-Khanabad highway) and in Emamsaheb district (in the vicinity of the highway connecting Kunduz to the Sherkan border’, and more than 64 000 people were displaced.²⁶⁹⁶ On 28 September 2020, the Taliban ‘launched a massive offensive on security checkpoints’ in Aliabad district.²⁶⁹⁷

In October 2020, an AAN report highlighted the increase in the ‘presence of Taleban fighters and checkpoints on Kunduz’s major roads’, in what was described as ‘arguably the greatest change’ for the province’s residents since the February 2020 Doha agreement. A source quoted in the report claimed that the Taliban controlled the Kabul-Baghlan-Kunduz highway. Moreover, travellers using ‘the highways to Khanabad and Aliabad have found it virtually impossible to avoid encountering Taleban fighters carrying weapons in the open or stopping motorists at checkpoints’, particularly at night.²⁶⁹⁸ In November 2020, International Crisis Groups reported that the Taliban had ‘ended self-imposed restrictions on attacking district centres’, and had attacked Kunduz city, while in December 2020, attacks on district centres in Kunduz continued.²⁶⁹⁹ On 6 January 2021, ‘ongoing armed clashes and roadblocks’ were reported in Khanabad²⁷⁰⁰, while on 7 January 2021, the Taliban attacked a military checkpoint outside Kunduz city, killing at least 12 security forces.²⁷⁰¹ On 15 January 2021, several Afghan security forces as well as a civilian were killed in a Taliban attack on

²⁶⁸⁷ AAN, Enemy Number One: How the Taleban deal with the ALP and uprising groups, 19 July 2018, [url](#); HRW, “Just Don’t Call It a Militia” Impunity, Militias, and the “Afghan Local Police”, 4 September 2011, [url](#), p. 13

²⁶⁸⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kunduz province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁸⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch Afghanistan, accessed 1 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 January – 26 January 2020), 26 January 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁶⁹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (10 February – 16 February 2020), 16 February 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁶⁹² International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch Afghanistan, accessed 1 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁶⁹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (29 June – 5 July 2020), 8 July 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁶⁹⁴ Reuters, Fight and talk: Facing negotiations, Taliban almost took key Afghan city, 14 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁹⁵ Daily Sabah, Wave of attacks across Afghanistan leaves at least 17 dead, 25 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Asia and the Pacific, Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot 18 - 24 August 2020, 25 August 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Flash Update No. 1 25 August 2020: Conflict displacement in Kunduz, Afghanistan, 25 August 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Flash Update No. 2 27 August 2020: Conflict displacement in Kunduz, Afghanistan, 27 August 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (17 – 23 August 2020), 26 August 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁶⁹⁷ Xinhua, Taliban attack on Afghan district repulsed, 12 killed, 28 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁹⁸ AAN, Taleban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan conflict has changed since the Doha agreement, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁹⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch Afghanistan, accessed 1 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 – 10 January 2021), 13 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷⁰¹ ABC News, Officials: Attacks around Afghanistan kill at least 23, 7 January 2021, [url](#)

'Orta-Boz security outpost in Emamsaheb district'.²⁷⁰² On 19 January 2021, attacks on security checkpoints in Dasht-e Archi district were reported.²⁷⁰³ During the week 8–14 February 2021, 'intense' fighting was reported, and the main highway connecting Imam Sahib to Aliabad was closed.²⁷⁰⁴

With regards to change in control over territory or facilities, some of the incidents include: on 8 January 2020, the Afghan security forces completed the 'first phase of Operation Pamir 110', clearing 'more than 50 villages' from 'insecure areas of Chardarah, Emamsaheb, Dasht-i-Archi, Khanabad, Qala-e-Zal, Gultepa' and Kunduz districts from Taliban fighters.²⁷⁰⁵ On 23 August 2020, a military base in the 'Qarghan Tapa area of Emamsaheb' district was taken over by the Taliban.²⁷⁰⁶ On 13 November 2020, took over 'Bala Hisar military base in Imam Sahib district' for several hours, before the Afghan security forces regained control of the base.²⁷⁰⁷

On 17 November 2020, Afghan security forces had regained control of Dasht-e-Archi district²⁷⁰⁸, after the Taliban had launched an attack on the district centre two days before.²⁷⁰⁹

There were 111 incidents of explosions/remote violence recorded by ACLED during the reference period in Kunduz. Most of them were attributed to either the Afghanistan security forces (some 48 %), or to the Taliban (around 41 %), while the remaining 11 % were attributed to NATO forces or to unidentified armed groups.²⁷¹⁰

Airstrikes were almost exclusively used by the Afghan security forces or by NATO forces against the Taliban²⁷¹¹, sometimes to aid ground troops during ongoing fighting. Several attacks resulted in civilian casualties. Between 27 January and 2 February 2020, airstrikes in 'Wazirkhan village of Dasht-e-Archi district' resulted in 5 civilian deaths.²⁷¹² Between 3 February and 9 February 2020, airstrikes 'impacted a school and a clinic in the Baghi Shirkat area of Kunduz province'.²⁷¹³ On 19 September 2020, repeated airstrikes in Khanabad district by the Afghan Air Force led to 15 civilian deaths and wounded 5 others.²⁷¹⁴ On 16 November 2020, air strikes were launched to aid the Afghan security forces during fighting against the Taliban in Dasht-e Archi district.²⁷¹⁵

Attacks by shelling and IEDs were used by the Taliban, by the Afghan security forces, as well as by unidentified armed groups. Between 10 and 16 February 2020, 'mortar shelling', as well as two civilians fatalities were reported, while on 11 February 2020 in a separate incident, five students were killed by an IED explosion in Kunduz.²⁷¹⁶ On 23 April 2020, 'a child was reportedly killed and five other civilians were wounded' when an IED exploded in Chardarah district.²⁷¹⁷ On 19 May 2020, 'a police officer and a civilian were reportedly killed, and 18 other civilians were wounded' by an IED

²⁷⁰² KUNA, Taliban attacks kill 12 Security men in N. Afghanistan, 15 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁰³ Military news, Afghan Officials: Taliban Attacks, Violence Kills Dozens, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (8 – 14 February 2021), 14 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷⁰⁵ Salaam Times, Afghan forces clear Taliban from over 50 villages in Kunduz, 16 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁰⁶ Tolonews, Taliban Attack Security Forces Base in Kunduz, 24 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁰⁷ ANI, 14 killed as Afghan forces retake military base in Kunduz, 13 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁰⁸ Ariana News, Dasht-e-Archi district in Kunduz cleared of Taliban, 17 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁰⁹ Tolonews, Clashes Reported in Dasht-e-Archi District, Reinforcements Sent, 16 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁷¹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kunduz province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁷¹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kunduz province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁷¹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January – 2 February 2020), 2 February 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷¹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (3 February – 9 February 2020), 9 February 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷¹⁴ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch Afghanistan, accessed 1 March 2021, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Third Quarter Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2020, 27 October 2020, [url](#), p. 13; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 – 20 September 2020), 23 September 2020, [url](#), p.1

²⁷¹⁵ Ariana News, Dasht-e-Archi district in Kunduz cleared of Taliban, 17 November 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Clashes Reported in Dasht-e-Archi District, Reinforcements Sent, 16 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁷¹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (10 February – 16 February 2020), 16 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁷¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 April – 26 April 2020), 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 1

detonation 'in the Kohna Faroshi area of Kunduz city'.²⁷¹⁸ On 9 November 2020, 'a mortar round hit a house' killing five civilians and wounding four others in Emamsaheb district'.²⁷¹⁹ On 26 January 2021, the deputy head of the Kunduz provincial council was killed by an IED explosion in Kunduz city.²⁷²⁰

Of the 14 incidents of violence against civilians recorded by ACLED during the reference period in Kunduz province, 6 were attributed to the Taliban, 5 to the Afghanistan security forces, 2 to unidentified armed groups, and 1 to NATO forces.²⁷²¹ Between 6 April and 12 April 2020, 'four civilians were killed and five people were abducted' at a Taliban checkpoint in Kunduz province.²⁷²²

During August 2020, conflict and related civilian fatalities were reported in Kunduz province, including 17 civilian deaths between 13 and 23 August 2020.²⁷²³ Between 31 August and 6 September 2020, ongoing fighting was reported in Emamsaheb district, and as of 6 September 2020, 11 civilians had died and 32 others had been wounded in the province.²⁷²⁴ On 24 September 2020, 'the Taliban militants fired a mortar shell that struck a house in Khan Abad district', killing three civilians and wounding another six.²⁷²⁵

Between 9 and 12 October 2020, several civilians fatalities due to active fighting were reported across Kunduz province²⁷²⁶, while on 14 December 2020, one civilian was killed 'in the Kalaw Gaw area of Kunduz city'.²⁷²⁷

Between 11 and 17 January 2021, 'several civilians' were 'abducted along the Kunduz and Aliabad roads and at illegal checkpoints in the Chenzai area along the road connecting Taloqan to Khanabad districts'.²⁷²⁸ On 19 January 2021, two civilians were reportedly killed and three others wounded in the Bagh-e-Shirkat area of Kunduz city after a Taliban attack.²⁷²⁹ Between 1 and 7 February 2021, four civilians were killed during fighting in Emamsaheb district.²⁷³⁰ During the week 8 – 14 February 2021, 'intense' fighting was reported, as well as 'targeted killings, abductions and illegal checkpoints', while one civilian was killed, and seven children were wounded in Aliabad district.²⁷³¹

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020-28 February 2021, reporting 73 211 persons displaced from Kunduz province, of which 72 583 (some 99 %) were displaced within the province, while 628 persons were displaced to Faryab, Hirat, Kabul, Nangarhar, and Parwan provinces. During the same period, some 119 persons arrived to Kunduz province from Faryab.²⁷³²

²⁷¹⁸ Garda World, Afghanistan: Security forces repel Taliban attack in Kunduz city May 19, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁷¹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (9 – 15 November 2020), 18 November 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷²⁰ Tolonews, Local Council Deputy Killed from Blast Injuries in Kunduz, 26 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁷²¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Kunduz province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁷²² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 April – 12 April 2020), 12 April 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷²³ UNOCHA, ASIA AND THE PACIFIC, Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot 18 - 24 August 2020, 25 August 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Flash Update No. 1 25 August 2020: Conflict displacement in Kunduz, Afghanistan, 25 August 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Flash Update No. 2 27 August 2020: Conflict displacement in Kunduz, Afghanistan, 27 August 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (17 – 23 August 2020), 26 August 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷²⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (31 August – 6 September 2020), 6 September 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷²⁵ Xinhua, 6 civilians killed, 12 injured as fighting intensifies in Afghanistan, 24 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁷²⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (12 – 18 October 2020), 22 October 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷²⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 – 20 December 2020), 23 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷²⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (11 – 17 January 2021), 19 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷²⁹ Xinhua, 16 security forces members, 2 civilians killed in clashes in Afghanistan's Kunduz, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁷³⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (1 – 7 February 2021), 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷³¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (8 – 14 February 2021), 14 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷³² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

By district inside Kunduz province, displacement during the reference period occurred from: Khanabad (39 %); Aliabad (27.8 %); Emamsaheb (17.4 %); Kunduz (15.4 %), Chardarah (0.2 %) and Dasht-e-Archi (0.11 %).²⁷³³

Some of the indicative displacement events include: between 30 December 2019 and 5 January 2020 approximately 7 224 people 'were displaced due to the clashes from Pule-Alchin, Sharabi, Buze'.²⁷³⁴ Between 13 and 19 January 2020, around 10 304 people were displaced to Kunduz city and Khanabad district due to clashes in Aqtash', while others 'were displaced from insecure areas in Tangi Bashir and Hazrat Sultan'.²⁷³⁵

During 3 – 9 August 2020, conflict took place 'in Kohna Qala village and Band-e-Barq area in Aqtash, Khanabad district, displacing some 2 800 people'.²⁷³⁶ Ongoing fighting during that month resulted in some 64 050 people being displaced by 27 August 2020, who were sheltering in several 'remote villages' of Khanabad, in Emamsaheb, in Aqtash, and in Kunduz city.²⁷³⁷ Soon after, between 31 August and 6 September 2020, some 11 060 people from Alchin, Talawka and Mullah-Sardar villages were displaced to Kunduz city.²⁷³⁸ Between 30 November and 6 December 2020, fighting in Kunduz displaced around 19 047 people.²⁷³⁹ In 2021, fighting between 1 and 7 February led to some 4 879 people being displaced across the province.²⁷⁴⁰

²⁷³³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁷³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 December 2019 – 5 January 2020), 5 January 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷³⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January - 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷³⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (3 – 9 August 2020), 12 August 2020, [url](#), p.1

²⁷³⁷ UNOCHA, ASIA AND THE PACIFIC, Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot 18 - 24 August 2020, 25 August 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Flash Update No. 1 25 August 2020: Conflict displacement in Kunduz, Afghanistan, 25 August 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Flash Update No. 2 27 August 2020: Conflict displacement in Kunduz, Afghanistan, 27 August 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (17 – 23 August 2020), 26 August 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷³⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (31 August – 6 September 2020), 6 September 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷³⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 November – 6 December 2020), 10 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (1 – 7 February 2021), 10 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

2.21 Laghman

2.21.1 General description of the province



Map 21: Afghanistan – Laghman province, source: UNOCHA²⁷⁴¹

Laghman is located in eastern Afghanistan²⁷⁴² and is divided into the following districts: Alingar, Alishang, Dawlatshah, Mehtarlam, Qarghayi²⁷⁴³, and Bad Pash (also Bad Pakh); the latter became a district of its own in 2011. The provincial capital of Laghman is Mehtarlam.²⁷⁴⁴

²⁷⁴¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#);

²⁷⁴² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Laghman, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²⁷⁴³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁷⁴⁴ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Laghman, 2020, [url](#); Foschini, F., The Enteqal Seven (2): Around Mehtarlam, an 'insurgency corridor' in the making, AAN, 10 May 2011, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 16

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 484 952.²⁷⁴⁵ Laghman is composed of a majority of Pashtuns, followed by Tajik and Pashai tribes.²⁷⁴⁶

The Kabul-Jalalabad Highway passes through Qarghayi district²⁷⁴⁷, where a secondary road branches off to connect to Nurgeram in Nuristan via the provincial capital Mehtarlam.²⁷⁴⁸ As of November 2020, this highway construction work, launched in 2010, was only 40% completed, and witnessed traffic jams due to high number of vehicles.²⁷⁴⁹ Bad Pash district has been a strategic crossing-point for Afghan and foreign insurgents coming from the border area and moving deeper into Afghanistan.²⁷⁵⁰

During the reporting period, in December 2020, the MRRD launched the construction of a 14 kilometers road in Alingar district, planned to be complete within six months.²⁷⁵¹ In January 2021, the MRRD launched a 38.8 kilometers road in the centre of the province. The Ministry did not publish further details about the districts crossed by this road planned to be finished within one year.²⁷⁵²

2.21.2 Conflict background and actors in Laghman

In December 2019, ANSF killed 20 Taliban militants, including the shadow governor of Taliban for Laghman province, Zainulabidin.²⁷⁵³

In March 2020, ISKP shadow governor for Laghman province and 30 fighters of the group surrendered to ANSF.²⁷⁵⁴ During the same period, several media sources cited Noorullah Shirzada, from Agence France Press (AFP), showing in a photo the presence of Taliban fighters in Alingar district.²⁷⁵⁵ In May 2020, Etilaatroz indicated that Taliban fighters had a widespread presence and carried out their activities in Mehtarlam district²⁷⁵⁶ and in a number of other districts of Laghman province including Alishang district.²⁷⁵⁷ During this same period, the Taliban shadow governor for Laghman province was Mawlawi Abdul Hadi Pashayeewal (also Pashaiwal)²⁷⁵⁸, and the head of the Taliban military commission for the mentioned province was Mawlawi Qais. Taliban based in Alingar district were reportedly recruiting new fighters via mosques, Quranic and school, and amongst friends and relatives.²⁷⁵⁹ On 10 May 2020, ANSF killed Omar Khater, the Taliban intelligence

²⁷⁴⁵ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷⁴⁶ BMC, 'The midwife helped me ... otherwise I could have died': women's experience of professional midwifery services in rural Afghanistan - a qualitative study in the provinces Kunar and Laghman, 6 March 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Laghman province, n.d., [url](#); US Naval Postgraduate School, Laghman Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷⁴⁷ INSI, Country profile for Afghanistan, Alerts, 7 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁷⁴⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, In 10 years, only 40pc work done on Kabul-Jalalabad road, 4 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁵⁰ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url](#);

Foschini, F., The Enteqal Seven (2): Around Mehtarlam, an 'insurgency corridor' in the making, AAN, 10 May 2011, [url](#)

²⁷⁵¹ Afghanistan, MRRD, Implementation of 14 km road construction project begun in Laghman province, 29 December 2020, [url](#); Bakhtar News Agency, Roads Construction Work Began in Laghman, 30 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁵² Afghanistan, MRRD, Construction of 38,8 Km road within one year in Laghman province, 26 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁵³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 Taliban including shadow governor killed in Laghman airstrike, 27 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁵⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Senior figure among 30 IS rebels surrender in Laghman, 19 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁵⁵ Salaam Times, Taliban, Al-Qaeda maintain "close ties" despite peace deal promises, 2 July 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Taliban ramp up attacks on Afghans after Trump says "no violence", 6 March 2020, [url](#); France24, Afghan Government set to release 1 500 prisoners, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁵⁶ Etilaatroz, سه غیر نظامی در انفجاری در لغمان کشته شدند[informal translation: 'three civilians killed in an explosion in Laghman, 2 May 2020], [url](#)

²⁷⁵⁷ Etilaatroz, ۲۱ سرباز ارتش در لغمان؛ ارگ: طالبان بر ادامه‌ی «افغان‌کشی» پافشاری دارند[informal translation: 'killing of 21 army soldiers in Laghman; Presidential palace: Taliban insist on continuing 'killing Afghans', 22 May 2020], [url](#)

²⁷⁵⁸ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 27

²⁷⁵⁹ New York Times (The), How the Taliban outlasted a superpower: tenacity and carnage, 26 May 2020, [url](#)

chief for Laghman province.²⁷⁶⁰ In January 2021, the Taliban commander for Laghman Abdul Samad Mullah Toor was killed at a mosque, and in February 2021, the Taliban shadow governor for Laghman, Abdul Hadi Pashaiwal was shot dead by unidentified gunmen near his residence, both in Peshawar in Pakistan. The Taliban suspected Islamic State's involvement in the murders.²⁷⁶¹

A survey of Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021 designated 42.50 % of the Laghman province under the government control, 54.17 % under the Taliban control and 3.33 % controlled by neither side. According to the same survey, 209 732 of people lived in areas under government control, 267 306 under Taliban control and 16 450 in areas controlled by neither side.²⁷⁶²

According to LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted in April 2021, Alingar, Alishang and Daulatshahi are assessed as 'contested' and the other districts as 'under GoA control or undetermined'. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Daulatshah shifted to 'Taliban control' and Mehtarlam and Qarghayi as 'contested'.²⁷⁶³ Earlier on 20 May 2021, Tolonews reported that ANDSF retreated from the centre of Dawlatshah district and fell in the hands of Taliban after six months besiege by the latter group.²⁷⁶⁴ According to New York Times (The), following negotiations (between the Taliban and ANDSF), Dawlatshah district centre surrendered (by ANDSF to Taliban) without resistance on 19 May 2021 and the following day (on 20 May) five outposts surrendered to the Taliban in Alishang district.²⁷⁶⁵

According to Khaama Press reporting in October 2018, Laghman, which was described as one of the 'relatively calm' provinces of Afghanistan, has seen a rise in activities by Taliban and ISKP militants in some remote districts of the province.²⁷⁶⁶

As of February 2019, the UN Secretary-General described Laghman as one of the ISKP 'strongholds' in Afghanistan.²⁷⁶⁷

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Laghman province decreased by 20 %.²⁷⁶⁸

In terms of the presence of government security forces, as of July 2020, Laghman province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.²⁷⁶⁹

2.21.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 267 civilian casualties (62 killed and 205 injured) in Laghman in ground engagements (leading cause), non-suicide IEDs and targeted killings. This represents a

²⁷⁶⁰ Reportedly, Security forces kill senior Taliban spy in Laghman, 10 May 2020, [url](#); Sputnik, Afghan Forces kill senior Taliban spy in Laghman province, 10 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁶¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban governor for Laghman gunned down in Peshawar, 28 February 2021, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban commander shot dead in Peshawar, 26 January 2021, [url](#); Bakhtar News Agency, Taliban Shadow Governor for Laghman Killed in Peshawar, 1 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁶² Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁶³ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). However, the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

²⁷⁶⁴ Tolonews, Laghman: ANDSF retreat from besieged center of Dawlat Shah, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁶⁵ New York Times (The), A wave of Afghan surrenders to Taliban picks up peek, 27 May 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁶⁶ Khaama Press, Four key Taliban group leaders ambushed in Laghman province, 1 October 2018, [url](#)

²⁷⁶⁷ UN Security Council, Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 1 February 2019, [url](#), p. 7

²⁷⁶⁸ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²⁷⁶⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 13, 59

decrease of 5% compared to 2019.²⁷⁷⁰ According to SIGAR, Resolute Support (RS) recorded between 51 and 75 civilian casualties in the province during the first,²⁷⁷¹ and between 76 and 100 the second quarter of 2020.²⁷⁷² No RS information on civilian casualties per province was available for the second half of 2020 in SIGAR quarterly reports.²⁷⁷³

From 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data on 185 violent events in Laghman province from open sources: 118 coded as 'battles', 56 coded as 'explosions/remote violence' and 11 coded as 'violence against civilians'.²⁷⁷⁴

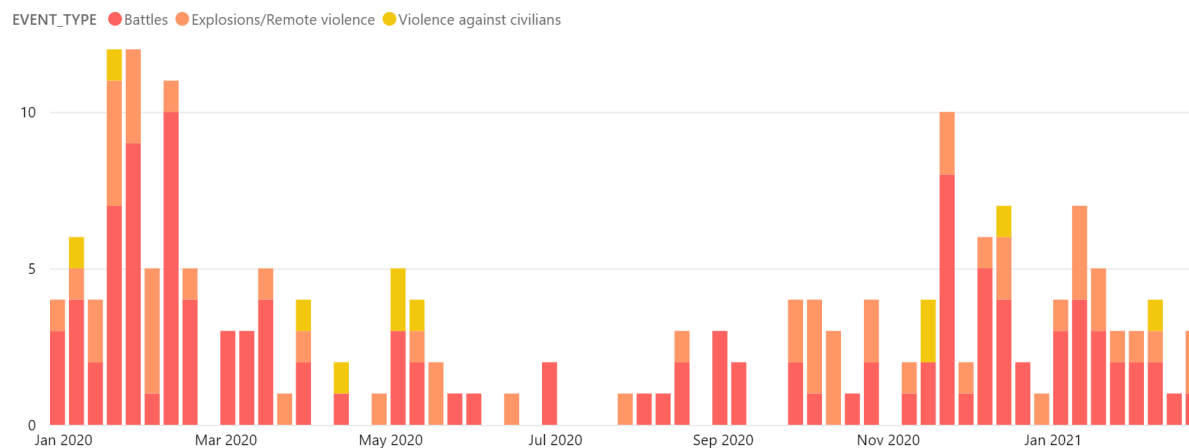


Figure 42: Laghman province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²⁷⁷⁵

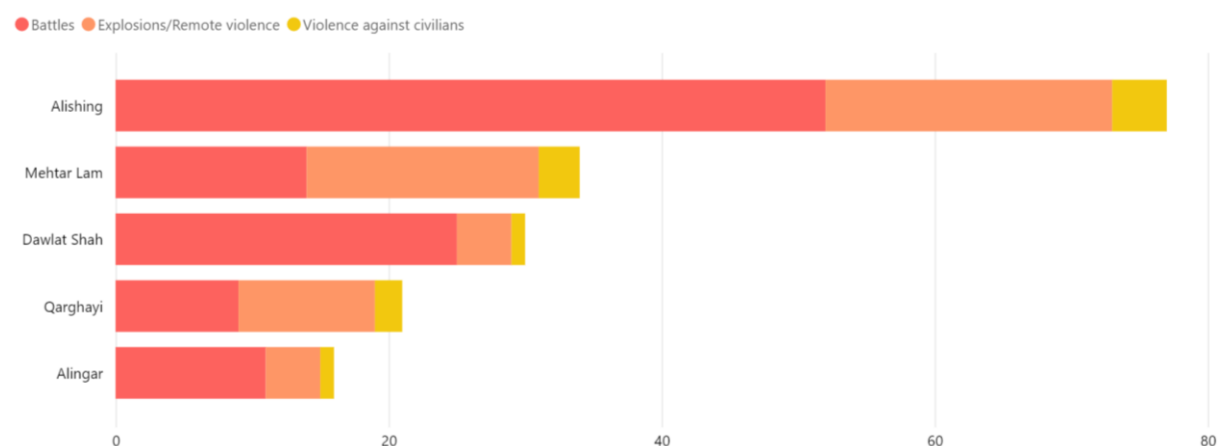


Figure 43: Laghman province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²⁷⁷⁶

²⁷⁷⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

²⁷⁷¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

²⁷⁷² SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

²⁷⁷³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁷⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Laghman province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁷⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Laghman province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁷⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Laghman province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 7 battles in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

The category 'battles' concerned mainly armed clashes between Afghan Security Forces and the Taliban while the category 'explosions/remote violence' concerned remote explosive/landmine/IED as well as shelling/artillery/missile attacks and air/drone strikes.²⁷⁷⁷

During the entire month of March clashes between ANSF and AGEs in Laghman province were reported.²⁷⁷⁸

In May 2020, clashes between ANSF and the Taliban took place in Alishang district.²⁷⁷⁹ On 7 July 2020, Khaama Press cited 201st Corps stating that the Afghan security forces killed 16 Taliban fighters and wounded 6 others in Sarkund Baba area of Laghman province, situated on the highway between Kabul and Jalalabad.²⁷⁸⁰

On 2 May 2020, three civilians were killed in Mehtarlam after a bomb set in a motorcycle went off in front of the prison²⁷⁸¹; on 23 May 2020, four children below the age of six were killed after a mortar shell hit a residential house in Gerdi Saleb area of Alishang district.²⁷⁸²

In September 2020, an important number of people fled Alishang district following heavy fighting between AGEs and ANSF. The security forces established checkpoints on main roads as the security situation was reported tense.²⁷⁸³

On 5 October 2020, the Governor of Laghman province, Rahmatullah Yarmal, was targeted by a suicide attack on the convoy vehicles. The official survived. 4 bodyguards and 4 civilians were killed, while 2 other bodyguards and 28 other civilians were injured. No group claimed the attack.²⁷⁸⁴

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 8 135 persons displaced from Laghman, of which 8 086 were displaced within the province. During the same period, 28 persons were displaced to Nangarhar province, 14 to Panjsher province and 7 in Ghor province.²⁷⁸⁵

During the first week of March 2020, around 2 296 people were displaced due to continued fighting in Alishang, Alingar and Mehterlam districts.²⁷⁸⁶ During the period of 15 – 21 June 2020, at least 1 000 nomad families (7 000 people) were blocked in Laghman province due to the COVID-19 restrictions.²⁷⁸⁷

IOM reported displacement of 150 families for the period 16 September 2020 - 6 October 2020 from Alishang district to Mehterlam city due to clashes between AGEs and ANSF.²⁷⁸⁸ According to

²⁷⁷⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Laghman province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Humanitarian Update, 16 March – 22 March 2020, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Humanitarian Update, 23 March – 29 March 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷⁷⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 soldiers, as many Taliban killed in Laghman firefight, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁸⁰ Khaama Press, 22 Taliban militants killed, wounded on Kabul-Jalalabad highway, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁸¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Explosion close to a prison leaves 3 dead in Laghman province of Afghanistan, 2 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁸² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁸³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 – 27 September 2020), 30 September 2020, [url](#), pp.1-2 ; IOM, Humanitarian Assistance Programme – Biweekly Report : 16 September 2020-06 October 2020, 11 October 2020, [url](#), p. 3

²⁷⁸⁴ Khaama Press, Laghman Governor Survived an Attempted Suicide Attack, 5 October 2020, [url](#); RFI, Afghanistan: un gouverneur visé par une attaque kamikaze, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁸⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 4 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁷⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Humanitarian Update, 9 March – 15 March 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁷⁸⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Humanitarian Update, 15 – 21 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷⁸⁸ IOM, Humanitarian Assistance Programme – Biweekly Report : 16 September 2020-06 October 2020, 11 October 2020, [url](#), p. 3

and Pul-e Alam districts. The majority of the population of Logar province is Sunni Muslim, but there are also some Shias.²⁷⁹⁸

Logar province is rich in chromite ore, with deposits extracted illegally and smuggled to Pakistan.²⁷⁹⁹ The province also houses the country's largest copper deposit, the mine of Mes Aynak in Mohammad Agha district.²⁸⁰⁰ Logar's natural resources have caused local rivalries over revenues coming from mineral deposits.²⁸⁰¹ Due to shrinking resources, population growth and sedentarisation processes, conflicts have been reported between nomads and settlers, for example in the districts of Azra²⁸⁰² and Baraki Barak.²⁸⁰³

Logar connects Kabul to Afghanistan's south-eastern region, Greater (Loya) Paktya, through the Kabul-Gardez Highway that runs east from the main national Ring Road and over the Tera Pass, traversing the districts of Mohammad Agha and Pul-e Alam.²⁸⁰⁴ A small airport is reportedly located near Pul-e Alam City, however, no information has been found on whether this is a functioning airport for civil aviation.²⁸⁰⁵ In February 2021, the Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority (ACAA) reported on the Afghan government's plan to construct a large new international airport in Logar, in the desert of Mohammad Agha district near the Mes Aynak copper mine. The project is estimated to be operational within three years (the entire work on the project is estimated to take 15 years), serving domestic and international flights. According to ACAA's chairman, the new airport will be used as an alternative to Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul City. Logar's provincial governor has asked the Taliban's cooperation for the security of the new airport.²⁸⁰⁶

2.22.2 Conflict background and actors in Logar

Logar province has served as a strategic crossing-point for Taliban fighters, not only due to its proximity to Kabul,²⁸⁰⁷ but also because it provided easy access to AGEs' fronts in the nearby provinces of Nangarhar, Paktya, Paktika, Khost, Wardak and Ghazni, as well as in Pakistan.²⁸⁰⁸ Kharwar, a mountainous district in the south of the province, was among the first ones in the central region where Taliban groups started to reorganise in 2005.²⁸⁰⁹ According to AAN analyst Obaid Ali, the security situation in Logar province started to deteriorate in 2011. The districts of Azra, Baraki

²⁷⁹⁸ US Naval Postgraduate School, Logar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷⁹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar Province: Illegal Extraction of Logar Chromites Goes On, 6 October 2015, [url](#); VOA, Report: Militant Groups in Afghanistan Get Rich off Mineral Smuggling, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²⁸⁰⁰ Tolonews, Logar Security 'Improves' after More Forces Deployed, 4 May 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Even If It Achieves Peace, Can Afghanistan Ever Be Financially Independent?, 1 December 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 121

²⁸⁰¹ Global Security Review, Are Afghanistan's Mineral Deposits an Answer to the Country's Economic Woes?, 9 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁰² Giustozzi, A., Nomad-Settler Conflict in Afghanistan Today, AREU, October 2019, [url](#), p. 27

²⁸⁰³ Giustozzi, A., Nomad Sedentarisation Processes in Afghanistan and Their Impact on Conflict, AREU, September 2019, [url](#), p. 10

²⁸⁰⁴ Ali, O., The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar's Struggle Against the Taleban, AAN, 15 December 2014, [url](#); Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁰⁵ Falling Rain, Directory of Airports in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); MSF, Afghanistan: Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#); Afghanistan, ACAA, All Airports, 24 September 2017, [url](#)

²⁸⁰⁶ Tolonews, Govt Plans to Build Intl Airport in Logar: Aviation Officials, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁰⁷ Al Jazeera, Taliban Attack in Afghanistan's Logar Kills Eight Security Forces, 20 January 2019, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁰⁸ Dorransoro, G., The Taliban's Winning Strategy in Afghanistan, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009, [url](#), pp. 22, 28; Ali, O., The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar's Struggle Against the Taleban, AAN, 15 December 2014, [url](#)

²⁸⁰⁹ Elias, M.O.T., The Resurgence of the Taliban in Kabul: Logar and Wardak, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field, 2009, pp. 45-46, 52

Barak, Charkh, Kharwar and Mohammad Agha were then indicated as the areas worst hit by the Taliban.²⁸¹⁰

Logar is described as among the volatile and insecure provinces of the country,²⁸¹¹ 'where the Taliban have influence and control',²⁸¹² regularly attacking government forces in both the provincial capital and the districts.²⁸¹³ In May 2020, the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reported to the UN Security Council on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made, including in Logar province.²⁸¹⁴

According to AAN analysts Ruttig and Sabawoon, Logar province together with neighbouring provinces such as Wardak, western Nangarhar and Surobi district of Kabul province are 'part of a belt that could cut off the capital from southern and eastern Afghanistan', if the security situation would escalate. Various causes for the continued insecurity throughout Logar are cited by local sources, such as the Taliban's resilient local structures in the province and a widespread regional sympathy for the Taliban, incompetent high government officials and a lack of proper coordination among security forces, government forces' harassment that pushes local people into the insurgency, as well as the hashish and chromite smuggling and the fight over its control. Security analysts describe Logar province as an example of 'statically disputed territory', without much change in territory and population control, but with intensive fighting indicating that increasing efforts are needed from the actors in the conflict to hold their terrain.²⁸¹⁵

Out of the six rural districts and the one surrounding Logar's capital Pul-e Alam, the government officially claims to control the provincial capital, Khoshi and Mohammad Agha. However, in an AAN dispatch from mid-July 2020, security analysts and local sources described a different picture. According to those sources, the Taliban were present in several villages just a few kilometres from the provincial capital, several areas in Mohammad Agha district are under Taliban control, heavy Taliban activity was reported in Baraki Barak, Charkh and Kharwar districts with the government only holding the district centres or small areas around them, Khoshi district was reportedly contested and the situation in Azra district is reported as volatile with the district centre besieged by the Taliban for the past 15 years.²⁸¹⁶ Azra is described as 'a strategic district', from where the Taliban could threaten Kabul and other neighbouring provinces.²⁸¹⁷

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 12 March 2021, indicated Kharwar, Charkh and Azra districts as 'Taliban-controlled' and Pul-e Alam, Mohammad Agha and Baraki Barak districts as 'contested'. Kharwar and Charkh districts were designated as 'contested' and Azra district as 'government-influenced'. Khoshi district was categorised as 'government-controlled' or 'undetermined' in this assessment. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Baraki Barak district shifted to 'Taliban control'.²⁸¹⁸ A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February

²⁸¹⁰ Ali, O., The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar's Struggle Against the Taleban, AAN, 15 December 2014, [url](#)

²⁸¹¹ Mashal, M., [Twitter], posted on: 1 July 2020, [url](#); Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Logar Residents Call for Security Days after Ghani Visit, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸¹² An Afghan analyst Lifos spoke to in January 2020. Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 52

²⁸¹³ Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸¹⁴ UN SECURITY COUNCIL, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9

²⁸¹⁵ Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸¹⁶ Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸¹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar's Azra District on the Verge of Collapse, 25 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁸¹⁸ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

2021²⁸¹⁹ designated 47.38 % of Logar's territory under government control, 52.38 % under Taliban control and 0.24 % controlled by neither side. According to the same survey, 205 811 of Logar's inhabitants live in areas under government control, 227 529 of the province's population live in areas under Taliban control and 1 034 of Logar's residents live in areas controlled by neither side.²⁸²⁰

According to media sources in 2020, Charkh district is indicated as the largest area under Taliban influence in Logar,²⁸²¹ with the militant group reportedly recruiting locally to build trust within the community.²⁸²² According to a Charkh resident, cited by the Washington Post in December 2020, the Taliban allowed the opening of a girls' high school in the district and permitted the travel to government-held territory for students to attend university.²⁸²³ Pajhwok Afghan News reported on increased Taliban attacks in Charkh in September 2020.²⁸²⁴ In the same month as well as in December 2020, foreign fighters (Pakistani and Chechen nationals) were reportedly seen among the Taliban ranks in Charkh.²⁸²⁵ In November 2020, a Taliban leader named Qari Ismail was killed by the Afghan security forces in the district.²⁸²⁶ In January 2021, Afghan Special Forces rescued several military and civilian prisoners from a Taliban prison in Charkh.²⁸²⁷ In March 2021, the Taliban reportedly claimed they took control of Charkh district. The Afghan government rejected the claim, indicating Charkh district as 'fully under the control of government forces'.²⁸²⁸ In September 2020, the Afghan Air Force bombed a Taliban camp, reportedly used as control and command centre for the Taliban's shadow intelligence chief for Logar province, called Shafiullah, in Baraki Barak district.²⁸²⁹ In February 2021, the Taliban's shadow district governor for Baraki Barak, with the same name Shafiullah, was killed while in the process of placing an IED.²⁸³⁰ In March 2021, the Taliban launched a COVID-19 awareness campaign in Baraki Barak district.²⁸³¹ In August and October 2020, LWJ reported on heavily armed Taliban fighters and a large militant convoy openly parading through Logar (a town in either Charkh or Baraki Barak district is indicated as location),²⁸³² with Taliban flags prominently displayed.²⁸³³ In February 2021, a key Taliban commander, named Mesbullah and reportedly planning the assassination of the deputy and advisor of Logar's provincial governor, was arrested by NDS forces in Pul-e Alam City.²⁸³⁴ In the same month, several Taliban militants were arrested by the General Command of Police Special Units (GCPSU) in Mohammad Agha district.²⁸³⁵ The Taliban reportedly also have a presence along nearly the whole stretch of the Kabul-Gardez

²⁸¹⁹ Through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires, Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed a total of 1 266 respondents for this survey, randomly selected across the country. Pajhwok acknowledges the complexity of this task and the possible inaccuracy of the provided information.

²⁸²⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁸²¹ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Launch Operation in Taliban-Held District in Logar, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸²² Washington Post (The), How Life under Taliban Rule in Afghanistan Has Changed - and How It Hasn't, 29 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁸²³ Washington Post (The), How Life under Taliban Rule in Afghanistan Has Changed - and How It Hasn't, 29 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁸²⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 Taliban Killed in Logar Clash, 6 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁸²⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 Taliban Killed in Logar Clash, 6 September 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Chechen Fighters Killed in Logar Firefight: MoD, 21 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁸²⁶ Bakhtar News Agency, Taliban Leader Killed in Logar Attack, 21 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁸²⁷ Khaama Press, Special Forces, Free 22 Prisoners in a 'Rescue Operation', 26 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁸²⁸ Tolonews, Defense Ministry: Charkh District under Govt Forces Control, 22 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁸²⁹ Xinhua, Clashes, Airstrike Kill 12 Militants in E. Afghanistan, 27 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁸³⁰ Reporterly, [Twitter], posted on: 16 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁸³¹ Reporterly, Taliban Launch Awareness Campaign on Coronavirus, 30 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁸³² LWJ, Taliban Parades Forces in Logar Province, 7 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁸³³ LWJ, Taliban Parades Fighters as 400 More Prisoners are Freed, 12 August 2020, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban Parades Forces in Logar Province, 7 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁸³⁴ Reporterly, NDS Arrests Member of Taliban's Terror Cell in Logar, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁸³⁵ Reporterly, [Twitter], posted on: 18 February 2021, [url](#); Reporterly, [Twitter], posted on: 21 February 2021, [url](#)

highway, especially in the Waghjan gorge of Muhammad Agha district and in the areas of Kolengar and Porak of Pul-e Alam district.²⁸³⁶

According to the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team's reporting to the UN Security Council in June/July 2019, ISKP has tried to expand its influence in the provinces of Logar and Paktya in the past, however without success.²⁸³⁷ Former Logar Taliban commander Abdul Hasib was reported to have taken over ISKP leadership for Afghanistan after leader Hafiz Saeed Khan was killed in July 2016. Abdul Hasib was killed in a joint Afghan and US operation in April 2017.²⁸³⁸ No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP have been recorded in Logar between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021 by ACLED.²⁸³⁹

In May 2020, information reported to the UN Security Council 'suggested that discussions were held among senior Haqqani Network figures to form a new joint unit of 2 000 armed fighters in cooperation with and funded by Al Qaeda'. This newly established unit would be split into two operational zones with the forces in the Loya Paktya area (including Khost, Logar, Paktika and Paktya provinces) under Hafiz Azizuddin Haqqani's command.²⁸⁴⁰ Further specific information on these two operational zones could not be found. However, a February 2021 report submitted to the UN Security Council stated that 'the overall number of members of Al Qaeda and its affiliates in Afghanistan is currently estimated at between 200 and 500, spread across 11 Afghan provinces', including Logar.²⁸⁴¹

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, Logar province remained a poppy-free province.²⁸⁴²

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Logar was reported to be under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps. According to USDOD reporting from April 2021, Task Force Southeast from NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan, previously including Logar province, is no longer active.²⁸⁴³ NDS unit 01 is reported to operate in the central region, including in Logar province. This paramilitary CIA-backed militia has been allegedly accused of human rights abuses, such as involvement in extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and attacks on medical facilities.²⁸⁴⁴ After a visit to Logar to evaluate the security situation in July 2020, President Ghani ordered the devising of a clear plan to boost security in the province. According to Logar's provincial governor, more security personnel would be stationed in urban areas of the province.²⁸⁴⁵ In January 2021, the last 300 US forces reportedly left FOB Shank in Logar province and handed it

²⁸³⁶ Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸³⁷ UN SECURITY COUNCIL, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 14; UN SECURITY COUNCIL, Ninth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat, 31 July 2019, [url](#), p. 7

²⁸³⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, October 2019, [url](#), p. 294

²⁸³⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁴⁰ UN SECURITY COUNCIL, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 13

²⁸⁴¹ UN SECURITY COUNCIL, Twenty-Seventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities, 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 15; Ruttig, T., A Deal in the Mist: How Much of the US-Taliban Doha Agreement Has Been Implemented?, AAN, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁴² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²⁸⁴³ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

²⁸⁴⁴ HRW, "They've Shot Many Like This" Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Clark, K., CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitaries Accused of Grave Abuses: New Human Rights Watch Report, AAN, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁴⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghani Stresses Coordination among Security Forces, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

over to the Afghan security forces. FOB Shank (with adjacent military airfield)²⁸⁴⁶ in Baraki Barak district used to be one of the largest US bases in Afghanistan, hosting around 18 000 American troops between 2006 and 2014.²⁸⁴⁷

2.22.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 171 civilian casualties (47 deaths and 124 injured) in Logar province. This represented a decrease of 22 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were suicide attacks, followed by ground engagements and targeted killings.²⁸⁴⁸ According to UNAMA, Logar is one of 16 provinces that experienced an increase in civilian casualties from ground engagements in 2020 compared to 2019.²⁸⁴⁹ Resolute Support (RS) recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Logar province in the first quarter of 2020²⁸⁵⁰ and between 101 and 125 civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020.²⁸⁵¹ RS data on civilian casualties per province for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.²⁸⁵²

According to AAN analysts Ruttig and Sabawoon, Logar province had an 'up-and-down in the intensity of fighting' in the first half of 2020. After a drop in violence over the winter of 2019-2020 followed by the week of reduced violence in February 2020, the Taliban reportedly intensified their attacks on government security posts throughout all districts as well as in the outskirts of the provincial capital since March 2020. Local residents reported to AAN on 'a stronger scale' of violence than in any year since the insurgency started in Logar province. This trend was confirmed to AAN by several Kabul-based security analysts, indicating that the number of security incidents in March 2020 was three and a half times higher in the province than in March 2019. In April and May 2020, large ANDSF operations and airstrikes were reported in several districts. In May 2020, the Taliban reportedly increased their attacks. Although Logar experienced 'a moderate decline' in fighting in June 2020, Mohammad Agha was recorded among the 25 districts with the highest number of incidents countrywide. Like in many parts of the country, a wave of targeted assassinations occurred in Logar in 2020.²⁸⁵³

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data from reports in open sources on 288 incidents related to insurgents in Logar province, of which 180 were coded as 'battles', 90 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 18 as 'violence against civilians'.²⁸⁵⁴

²⁸⁴⁶ Falling Rain, Directory of Airports in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); MSF, Afghanistan: Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#)

²⁸⁴⁷ Tolonews, US Leaves Logar's 'FOB Shank,' Once Home to 18K Troops, 4 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁴⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

²⁸⁴⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72

²⁸⁵⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

²⁸⁵¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

²⁸⁵² SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁵³ Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁵⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

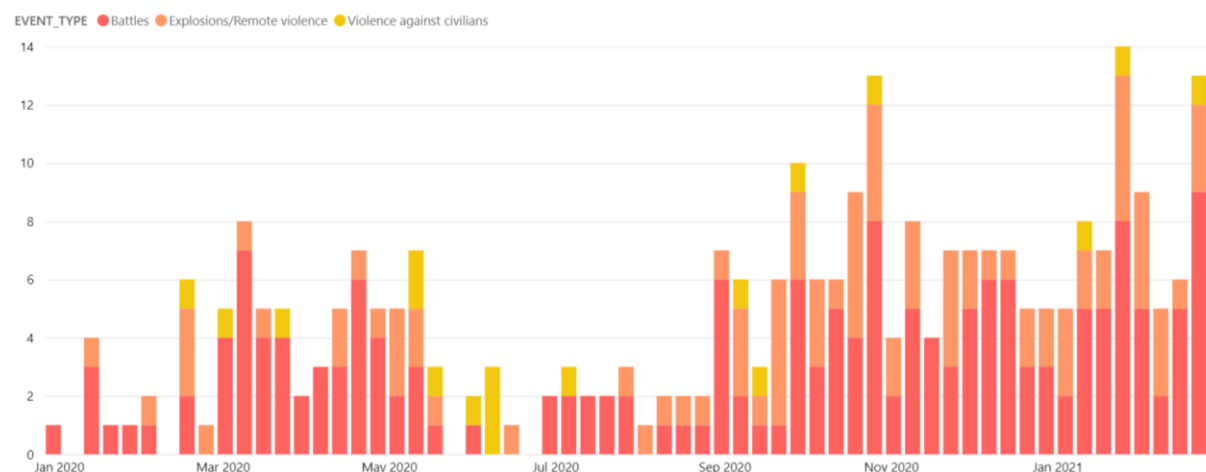


Figure 44: Logar province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²⁸⁵⁵

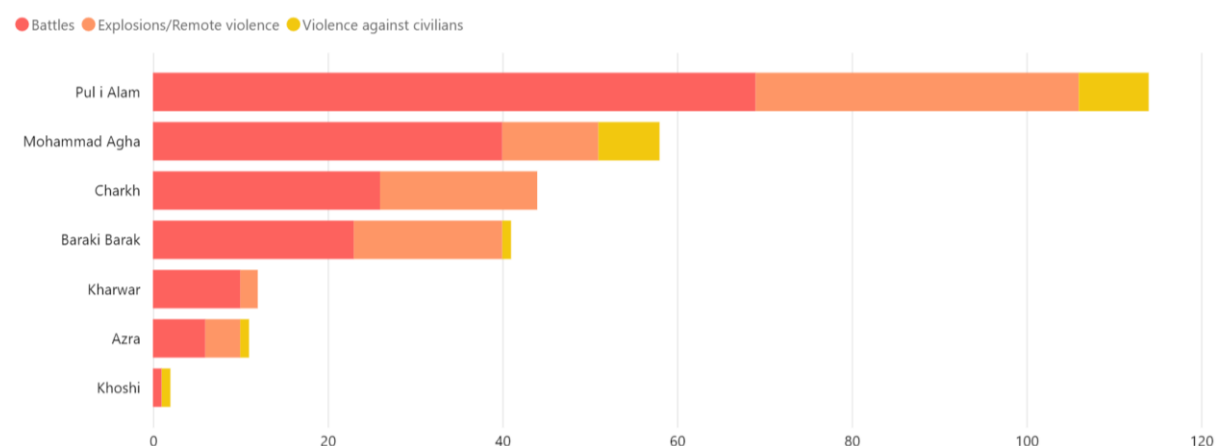


Figure 45: Logar province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data²⁸⁵⁶

ACLED recorded around 63 % of the violent incidents in Logar as ‘battles’, nearly all of which were coded as ‘armed clashes’. The majority of the armed clashes in Logar were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police and NDS personnel as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis*²⁸⁵⁷.²⁸⁵⁸ Examples of such incidents included: assaults on security checkpoints/outposts in different areas near the provincial capital Pul-e Alam in April 2020,²⁸⁵⁹ in September 2020,²⁸⁶⁰ in November 2020²⁸⁶¹ and in February 2021.²⁸⁶² in different areas

²⁸⁵⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁵⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 6 incidents (5 battles and 1 remote violence) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 - see introduction)

²⁸⁵⁷ For more information on *arbaki*: see section 1.2.1 Pro-government forces.

²⁸⁵⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁵⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁶⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#);

Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar: 13 Uprising Members Killed in Taliban Raid, 12 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁶¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban Offensive Claims 4 ANP in Logar Province, 10 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁶² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, 9 Public Uprising Force Members Killed in Logar Attack, 23 February 2021, [url](#)

(such as near the Mes Aynak copper mine) in Mohammad Agha district in March 2020,²⁸⁶³ in April 2020²⁸⁶⁴ and in July 2020;²⁸⁶⁵ in Charkh district in April 2020²⁸⁶⁶ and in September 2020²⁸⁶⁷ and in Baraki Barak district in April 2020;²⁸⁶⁸ an ambush on a police vehicle in the provincial capital Pul-e Alam in April 2020;²⁸⁶⁹ the killing of two NDS officers by unknown gunmen in Pul-e Alam in January 2021.²⁸⁷⁰ Information on civilian casualties reported during these incidents was not found among the sources consulted.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.²⁸⁷¹ These incidents involved for example: the killing and wounding of several Taliban militants in operations in Mohammad Agha district in May 2020,²⁸⁷² in Charkh district in January 2020²⁸⁷³ and in April 2020²⁸⁷⁴ and in Azra district in April 2020;²⁸⁷⁵ clearing operations carried out by the General Command of Police Special Units (GCPSU) in Mohammad Agha district in November 2020²⁸⁷⁶ and in Pul-e Alam City in December 2020;²⁸⁷⁷ killing several Taliban militants and seizing large amounts of ammunition; the arrest of several Taliban militants and a key commander by NDS and GCPSU forces in the districts of Mohammad Agha²⁸⁷⁸ and Pul-e Alam²⁸⁷⁹ in February 2021. Information on civilian casualties reported during these incidents was not found among the sources consulted.

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented about 23 % of all reported security incidents in Logar. The majority of IED incidents were registered in the districts of Pul-e Alam, followed by Charkh and Baraki Barak.²⁸⁸⁰ Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. In August 2020, during the three-day ceasefire for *Eid al-Adha*, 4 people were reportedly killed and another 57 wounded in a car bombing targeting a police checkpoint in Pul-e Alam.²⁸⁸¹ In February 2021, 1 civilian was reportedly killed and 20-30 others injured when a bomb attached to an electricity pole exploded in Baraki Barak district.²⁸⁸²

²⁸⁶³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 Security Forces Killed in Logar, Helmand Attacks, 3 March 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁶⁴ Reuters, Clashes Across Afghanistan Kill Dozens of Security Force Members, Militants, 22 April 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Trump, Qatar's Emir Talk Taliban Attacks Across Afghanistan, 23 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁶⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Govt Forces Killed in Logar Attack, 17 July 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Kill, Wound 14 Taliban Militants in Logar Province, 27 July 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 6 Taliban Killed in Logar Clashes: Officials, 27 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁶⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Taliban Kills Nine Afghan Soldiers in Attack on Army Post, 16 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁶⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 Taliban Killed in Logar Clash, 6 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁶⁸ Tolonews, 7 Afghan Forces Killed in Taliban Attack in Logar: Tribal Elders, 26 April 2020, [url](#); Ariana News, Taliban Captures Police Outpost - Logar, 26 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁶⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Intelligence Officials Gunned Down in Logar, 18 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁷¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁷² Khaama Press, 11 Taliban Militants Killed, 4 Wounded in Special Forces Raid in Logar, 10 May 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Nearly a Dozen Taliban Killed in Logar Raid, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁷³ Khaama Press, Afghan Military Operations Kill 8 Taliban Militants, 17 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁴ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Launch Operation in Taliban-Held District in Logar, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁵ Khaama Press, Afghan Force Kill, Wound 14 Taliban Militants; Detain 2 Others in 3 Provinces, 24 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁶ Khaama Press, Security Officials Seize Ammunition, Nab 4 in Logar Operation, 1 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁷ Khaama Press, 2 Taliban Killed in Logar Operation: MoIA, 6 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁸ Reportedly, [Twitter], posted on: 18 February 2021, [url](#); Reportedly, [Twitter], posted on: 21 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁹ Reportedly, NDS Arrests Member of Taliban's Terror Cell in Logar, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁸⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁸¹ Afghanistan Times, 32 People Killed in Three-Day Ceasefire: Report, 5 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁸² Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar: 1 Killed, 25 Injured in Baraki Barak Explosion, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

During the reference period, ACLED registered one suicide bomb attack in Logar province.²⁸⁸³ On 30 July 2020, a few hours before the national three-day ceasefire was to begin for *Eid al-Adha*, 8 civilians were killed and around 73 more injured²⁸⁸⁴ when a suicide bomber targeted a police checkpoint near the crowded Ghazi roundabout in Pul-e Alam City.²⁸⁸⁵ The Taliban denied their involvement, but according to intelligence information obtained by the Afghan Minister of Interior the attack was designed by a local Taliban commander in Logar province.²⁸⁸⁶

Air/drone strikes represented about 5 % of all reported violent incidents in Logar. Most air/drone strikes were carried out in Baraki Barak and Pul-e Alam districts, followed by Charkh, Azra and Kharwar districts. Nearly all these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces, one was attributed to NATO forces.²⁸⁸⁷ The air/drone strikes mostly inflicted losses among AGEs, such as in Charkh district²⁸⁸⁸ and on the outskirts of Pul-e Alam City²⁸⁸⁹ in April 2020, in Baraki Barak district in May 2020,²⁸⁹⁰ September 2020²⁸⁹¹ and February 2021²⁸⁹² and in Mohammad Agha district in August 2020.²⁸⁹³ In September 2020, the Taliban reported on the targeting of a civilian car and a mosque by US drones in Kharwar district, killing two and injuring eight civilians.²⁸⁹⁴ This claim was denied by a US military spokesman in Afghanistan.²⁸⁹⁵ In November 2020 and January 2021, media sources reported on drone attacks carried out by the Taliban targeting the Afghan security forces in several provinces, including Logar. In addition to reconnaissance activities and for propaganda videos, the militant group has reportedly used small low-cost drones with explosives to target Afghan security checkpoints in Logar.²⁸⁹⁶

ACLED coded around 2 % of the violent incidents in Logar as ‘shelling, artillery and missile attacks’.²⁸⁹⁷ Some of these incidents resulted in civilian casualties, for example: in February and March 2020, when mortar shell leftovers exploded in Charkh²⁸⁹⁸ and Azra²⁸⁹⁹ districts, killing two or three children; and in May 2020, when a Taliban-fired mortar landed on a civilian house in Azra district, killing one child.²⁹⁰⁰ In August and September 2020, the Taliban reported on mortar shells

²⁸⁸³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁸⁴ Civilian casualty data according to UNAMA.

²⁸⁸⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Car Bomb Kills at least 17 in Afghanistan ahead of Ceasefire, 30 July 2020, [url](#); BBC News, Afghanistan: At least 17 Killed in Eid Car Blast, 31 July 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 44

²⁸⁸⁶ New York Times (The), 29 Dead after ISIS Attack on Afghan Prison, 3 August 2020, updated 7 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁸⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁸⁸ Khaama Press, Video: Precision Airstrikes Kill 10 Taliban Militants, Wound 16 in Logar, 19 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁸⁹ Xinhua, 7 Militants Killed in Predawn Airstrike in E. Afghanistan, 26 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Kill 7 Pro-Govt Fighters in Takhar Ambush, 18 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁹¹ Xinhua, Clashes, Airstrike Kill 12 Militants in E. Afghanistan, 27 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁹² Bakhtar News Agency, Eight Taliban Insurgents Killed in Airstrike, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 Militants Killed in Logar, Paktia Violence, 12 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁹⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁹⁵ VOA, Afghan Rivals Talk Peace as Battlefield Attacks Continue, 13 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 Security Official Killed, 7 Wounded in Logar, 8 November 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, ‘Taliban Uses Drones in Attacks on Afghan Forces’: Officials, 9 November 2020, [url](#); National (The), Taliban Adopting Drone Warfare to Bolster Attacks, 4 January 2021, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban PsyOps: Afghan Militants Weaponize Commercial Drones, 29 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁹⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁸⁹⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁹⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Children Killed, 8 Injured in Logar Mortar Shell Blast, 10 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁰⁰ Afghanistan Times, Child killed in Taliban Mortar Attack in Logar, 9 May 2020, [url](#)

fired by the Afghan military in Azra and Kharwar district, injuring five civilians.²⁹⁰¹ In July 2020, several mortars were fired at Ashraf Ghani and his delegation when the President visited his home province; no casualties were reported.²⁹⁰²

ACLED categorised about 6 % of all reported violent incidents in Logar as ‘violence against civilians’.²⁹⁰³ These incidents involved for example: the shooting by unidentified gunmen of a civil society activist in Pul-e Alam in March 2020;²⁹⁰⁴ the execution of two sisters by the Taliban in Mohammad Agha district in June 2020;²⁹⁰⁵ the kidnapping and killing of a former senator for Logar province by the Taliban also in June 2020;²⁹⁰⁶ the shooting of a female provincial council member in Pul-e Alam in July 2020;²⁹⁰⁷ a Taliban gun attack on two senior provincial council members in Mohammad Agha district in September 2020;²⁹⁰⁸ a Taliban attack on the residence of Baraki Barak’s district governor in Muhammad Agha district, killing his bodyguard and one of his brothers in September 2020;²⁹⁰⁹ the killing of three civilians, including a former local police commander, by the Taliban in the provincial capital Pul-e Alam in October 2020;²⁹¹⁰ the killing of the district governor of Zazai Maidan district in Khost province in an ambush by unknown gunmen on the way to Kabul in October 2020;²⁹¹¹ and the killing of an engineer by unknown gunmen in Mohammad Agha district in February 2021.²⁹¹²

In July 2020, residents of Logar’s provincial capital Pul-e Alam reportedly voiced concerns over a surge in the level of violence in the province. Cited by Afghan news agency Tolonews, respondents referred to gunfire heard throughout the night in Pul-e Alam and a peak of insecurity in the villages. According to a local ANA commander, the Afghan security forces regularly conducted search operations and will expand their deployment from inside the city of Pul-e Alam to the countryside if necessary. Additionally, a new separate scout force has reportedly been deployed to mend the fragile security in the province.²⁹¹³ In the same month, UNOCHA indicated the impact of the volatile security situation in Logar on government resources and law enforcement in the province, contributing to rising criminality.²⁹¹⁴

Several sources reported on increased threats and insecurity due to ongoing fighting between ANDSF forces and insurgency groups on the main road connecting Kabul to Logar province, negatively affecting civilian movements.²⁹¹⁵ The Taliban were reportedly involved in disturbing security on the Kabul-Gardez Highway, regularly blocking the road, installing checkpoints and

²⁹⁰¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁰² Tolonews, Ghani, Fired at During Logar Visit, Pledges Increased Security, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁰³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Logar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁰⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians, Civil Society Activists gunned Down in Pul-i-Alam, 29 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁰⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Execute 2 Young Sisters in Logar, 7 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁰⁶ Ariana News, Taliban Kill Former Afghan Senator in Logar: Local Officials, 9 June 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Gun Down Former Senator in Logar, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁰⁷ Tolonews, Logar Provincial Council Member Shot, Wounded, 6 July 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Female Politician Wounded in Attack, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar PC chief, Secretary Survive Gun Attack, 10 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁰⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban Ambushes District Governor’s Residence, 15 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁹¹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ex-ALP Leader among 3 Killed in Logar, 3 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁹¹¹ Tolonews, District Governor in Khost Killed in Ambush, 20 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁹¹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Engineer Gunned Down in Logar, 28 February 2021, [url](#)

²⁹¹³ Tolonews, Logar Residents Call for Security Days after Ghani Visit, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁹¹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 - 12 July 2020), 15 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁹¹⁵ Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 - 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

searching vehicles and passengers whom they suspect are government or NGO employees.²⁹¹⁶ This has left some government outposts along the road in precarious positions and increased the risk of violence along stretches of the highway.²⁹¹⁷

In its January 2020 Monthly Humanitarian Update, UNOCHA listed Logar as third in the top three provinces with the highest number of schools closed or damaged by conflict.²⁹¹⁸ In a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report published in June 2020, Taliban officials declared that although they were open to education for girls and women at all levels, they have to take into account local norms when establishing rules and guidelines on community level and 'would not impose it on communities who did not accept it'. The officials indicated Logar as a province where people are more 'open-minded' about girls' education.²⁹¹⁹ In March 2021, Taliban militants reportedly threatened and barred 7 500 religious students from attending classes in a *madrassa* in Logar province.²⁹²⁰

At the end of January 2020, Afghanistan's Attorney General's Office (AOG) opened an investigation into the alleged sexual abuse of hundreds of boys from several schools in rural areas of Logar province, reported by an Afghan civil society organisation in November 2019.²⁹²¹ According to an administrator of one of the schools cited by the New York Times, 'three boys who had reported rapes were later killed by the Taliban, who condemn the sexual abuse as anti-Islamic'.²⁹²² In its 2020 annual report, UNAMA mentioned its continued support for the AOG committee tasked with an independent and impartial investigation. Several of the 21 suspects identified by the committee have reportedly been arrested and sentenced. According to UNAMA, none of the perpetrators are linked to any of the parties in the Afghan conflict.²⁹²³

Concerning attacks related to health care provision in 2020, the WHO registered six health care patients as severely affected (three patients injured and three patients released after being detained) in Pul-e Alam district of Logar province.²⁹²⁴ In June 2020, a rocket fired by the Taliban damaged the provincial hospital in Pul-e Alam district.²⁹²⁵

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 - 28 February 2021, reporting 2 317 persons displaced from Logar province, of which the majority (1 827) were displaced within the province itself (all finding refuge in Pul-e Alam district). The remaining 490 IDPs from Logar sought shelter in neighbouring provinces Kabul (315) (Kabul district), Khost (84) (Khost (Matun) district), Paktya (77) (Gardez district) and Nangarhar (14) (Khogyani district). The majority of IDPs in Logar province were displaced from Baraki Barak district (1 036) with peaks in the first half of January and February 2020 and in the beginning of June and August 2020; and from Mohammad Agha district (686) with peaks in January, February, June and August 2020. Smaller numbers of IDPs were displaced from Charkh district (217) in February and July 2020, Kharwar district (154) in January 2020, Pul-e Alam district (140) in June and August 2020, Khoshi district (70) in February 2020 and Azra district (14) in October

²⁹¹⁶ Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), On Afghan Highways, Even the Police Fear the Taliban's Toll Collectors, 1 November 2020, updated 12 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁹¹⁷ New York Times (The), On Afghan Highways, Even the Police Fear the Taliban's Toll Collectors, 1 November 2020, updated 12 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁹¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Monthly Humanitarian Update (January 2020, 11 February 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁹¹⁹ HRW, "You Have No Right to Complain": Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), p. 18

²⁹²⁰ Reportedly, [Twitter], posted on: 4 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁹²¹ Guardian (The), Investigation Begins into Alleged Abuse of More Than 500 Boys in Afghanistan, 29 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁹²² New York Times (The), 3 Afghan Schools, 165 Accounts of Students Being Raped, 25 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁹²³ UNAMA, Afghanistan - Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 32-33

²⁹²⁴ WHO, Afghanistan - Attacks on Health Care (January 01 - December 31, 2020, 11 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁹²⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2020: 1 January - 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 19

2020. No conflict-induced internal displacement to Logar province from other provinces was reported by UNOCHA during the same period.²⁹²⁶

During the last two weeks of March 2020, UNOCHA reported on the displacement of approximately 350 families due to conflict in Logar province.²⁹²⁷ In January 2021, UNOCHA reported on 4 942 people displaced by conflict in Logar province (assessments are ongoing in order to verify this information).²⁹²⁸

According to IOM data from January to June 2020, one in three persons in Logar province are either an IDP or returnee and over 85 % of IDPs in Logar have not returned home. IOM additionally indicates Logar as one out of eight provinces where 49 % of Afghan returnees reside.²⁹²⁹ In an Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM) report published in September 2020, host community members in Logar province expressed their concern on overstretched services resulting from the influx of displaced households and leading to the risk of exclusion of IDP households from basic services.²⁹³⁰ In UNOCHA's Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2021, Logar is mentioned as a province where over one third of displaced households reported at least three locations (roads, markets and health facilities) where women/girls feel unsafe.²⁹³¹ More than a third of the assessed displaced households expressed concerns about explosive hazards in Logar, among other provinces (such as Wardak, Paktika, Farah, Ghazni and Kunduz).²⁹³²

²⁹²⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁹²⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 March - 5 April 2020), 5 April 2020, [url](#), p. 2

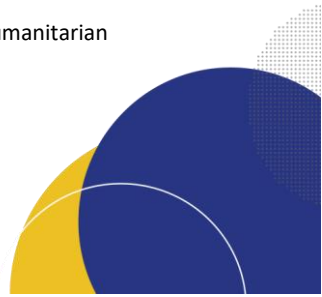
²⁹²⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (11-17 January 2021), 19 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

²⁹²⁹ IOM, DTM Afghanistan, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results Round 10 Jan-June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 7

²⁹³⁰ ERM, Protection Analysis Report: May - July 2020, 9 September 2020, [url](#), pp. 8, 12

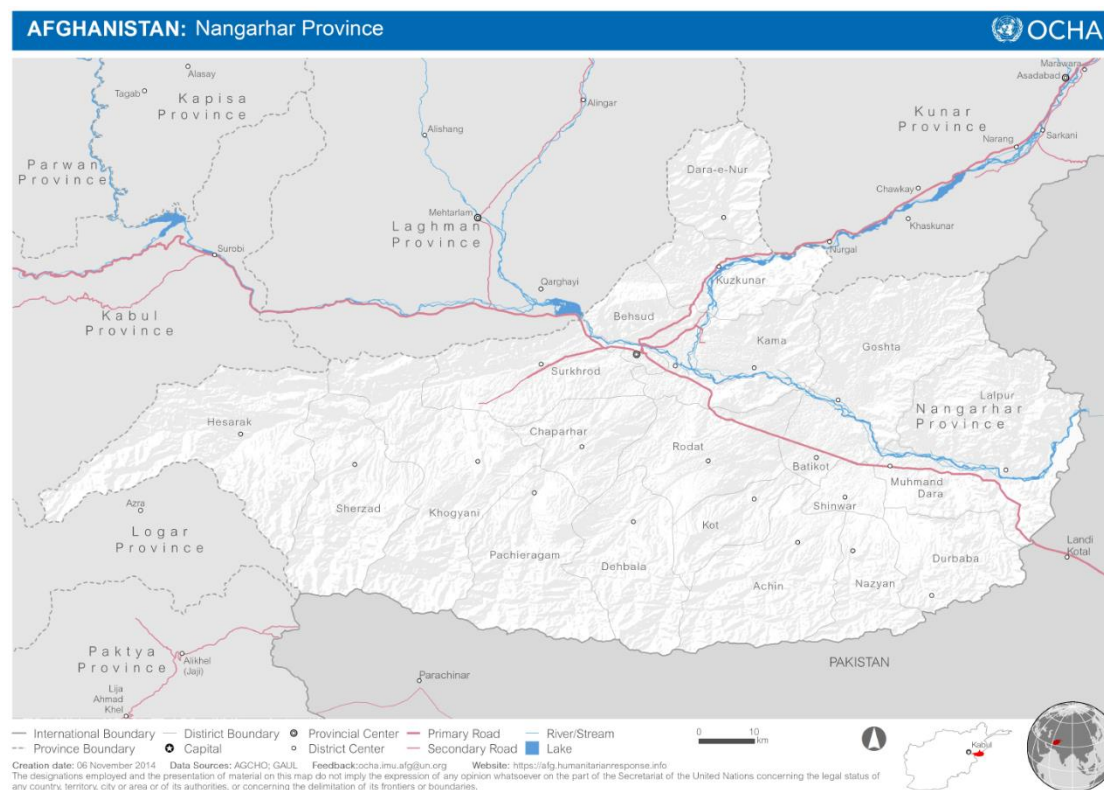
²⁹³¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan 2021, 19 December 2020, [url](#), p. 137; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan – Afghanistan 2018 - 2021, 9 January 2021, [url](#), p. 105

²⁹³² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan 2021, 19 December 2020, [url](#), p. 137



2.23 Nangarhar

2.23.1 General description of the province



Map 23: Afghanistan – Nangarhar province, source: UNOCHA²⁹³³

Nangarhar is located in eastern Afghanistan, along the Afghan-Pakistani border, and is divided into the following districts: Achin, Batikot, Behsud, Chaparhar, Dara-i Nur, Deh Bala (also known as Haska Mena), Durbaba, Goshta, Hesarak, Jalalabad, Kama, Khogyani, Kot, Kuzkunar (also known as Khiwa²⁹³⁴), Lalpur, Muhmand Dara, Nazyan, Pachieragam (sometimes spelled 'Pachir Wa Agam'²⁹³⁵), Rodat, Sherzad, Shinwar (also known as Ghanikhel) and Surkhrod.²⁹³⁶ The NSIA also mentions a district named Spinghar but defines it as 'temporary'.²⁹³⁷ The provincial capital of Nangarhar is Jalalabad.²⁹³⁸

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1 668 481. The rural population accounts for about 85 % of the total.²⁹³⁹

The main ethnic groups in the province are Pashtuns, followed by Pashai, Arabs and Tajiks.²⁹⁴⁰ As for the local Sikh and Hindu community, it used to be primarily present in and nearby Jalalabad.

²⁹³³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Provincial Reference Map – Nangarhar Province, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 22

²⁹³⁴ UNHCR, District Profile: Khas Kunar, Kunar, 10 August 2002, [url](#), p. 1

²⁹³⁵ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹³⁶ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 14-15; Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Nangarhar, 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nangarhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); US NavalPostgraduate School, Nangarhar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Kazemi, S. R. and Soroush, R., One Land, Two Rules (4): Delivering public services in embattled Achin district in Nangrahar province, AAN, 25 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁹³⁷ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 15

²⁹³⁸ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Nangarhar, n. d., [url](#)

²⁹³⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 10

²⁹⁴⁰ US Naval Postgraduate School, Nangarhar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

Confronted with the government's indifference, many of its members have been increasingly leaving Nangarhar following the July 2018 ISKP suicide attack carried out against the community in Jalalabad.²⁹⁴¹ As of July 2020, 45 Sikh families were reported to still be living in the province.²⁹⁴² According to 2019 and 2020 estimates, there were also between 80 000 and 100 000 nomad families in Nangarhar.²⁹⁴³

The Regional Highway 05 (RH05) starts from Kabul²⁹⁴⁴ and passes through the districts of Surkhrod, Jalalabad, Behsud, Rodat, Batikot, Shinwar, Muhmand Dara, before reaching the Afghan-Pakistani border at Torkham.²⁹⁴⁵ The construction of the second Kabul-Jalalabad highway (reserved to long-transit vehicles) started in 2010 but, as of November 2020, was still delayed due to security concerns in Hesarak, Khogyani and Sherzad.²⁹⁴⁶ In December 2020, construction work was launched on a 10 kilometre-long road in Rodat district.²⁹⁴⁷ This same month, Afghan newspaper Etilaatroz reported that the Sulemankhel Road, in Pachieragam district, had reopened after years of being closed.²⁹⁴⁸

Nangarhar, which borders the tribal areas of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province²⁹⁴⁹, has served as an unofficial crossing-point for local and foreign militants.²⁹⁵⁰ In 2020, London School of Economics expert David Mansfield listed Garo, Dawtakhel, Ghwaraky, Kama Dakah, Sasobai and Tabai as unofficial crossings, some of them being hubs for all types of illicit trafficking.²⁹⁵¹

Construction work on a civilian airport in Jalalabad started in 2017. It is located in the eastern part of the current military airbase, at the junction of Jalalabad and Behsud districts, along the main highway. The airbase was used by foreign troops until it was handed back to Afghan forces following the 2020 US/Taliban Doha Agreement. As of January 2021, the project was supposed to 'be completed in a few years'. Although Bakhtar Afghan Airways operated its first Kabul-Jalalabad test-flight in January 2021, no date has been announced for the opening of the new airport to commercial traffic.²⁹⁵² In January 2021, additional forces were deployed to protect the airport.²⁹⁵³

2.23.2 Conflict background and actors in Nangarhar

According to a 2014 study by Ashley Jackson, provincial governor Gul Agha Sherzai, enjoyed wide support in the first years following his appointment. He redirected massive amounts of foreign aid

²⁹⁴¹ Foschini, F., The Other Fold of the Turban: Afghanistan's Hindus and Sikhs, AAN, 23 September 2013, [url](#); Australian Institute of International Affairs, A Precarious State: the Sikh Community in Afghanistan, 11 July 2018, [url](#); Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Afghanske sikher og hinduer, 29 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 13-14

²⁹⁴² New York Times (The), India Offers Escape to Afghan Hindus and Sikhs Facing Attacks, 19 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁴³ Giustozzi, A., Nomad-settler conflict in Afghanistan today, AREU, 13 November 2019, [url](#), p. 14; Pajhwok Afghan News, Our pastures grabbed, livestock under threat: Nangarhar nomads, 17 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁴⁴ Italy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Evaluation Report - Afghanistan: Rehabilitation of Maidan Shar – Bamyan Road, 2014, [url](#), p. 7

²⁹⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nangarhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#), pp. 2, 18

²⁹⁴⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, In 10 years, only 40pc work done on Kabul-Jalalabad road, 4 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁴⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 50-bed hospital completes in Nangarhar's Rodat district, 30 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁴⁸ Etilaatroz, له کونو بندېدو وروسته د ننگرهار پچیراګام کې د سلېمانخېلو لار پرانیستل شوه [informal translation, After years of closure, the Sulemankhel Road in Pachiragam, Nangarhar, was reopened], 3 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁴⁹ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#)

²⁹⁵⁰ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#); New Arab (The), In Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, violence is committed by all sides, 25 January 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁵¹ Mansfield, D., Business as Usual: The Uninterrupted Illicit Supply Chain across the Borders of Afghanistan, Medium, 5 May 2020, [url](#); Mansfield, D., Mules, Pick-ups and Container Traffic: Cross-Border Production and Trade and the Shaping of the Political Economy of Nangarhar, AREU, 6 July 2020, [url](#), p. 16

²⁹⁵² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nangarhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#), p. 5; Pajhwok Afghan News, Initial work on Nangarhar civil airport to begin soon, 2 January 2017, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Test flights begin from Kabul to Nangarhar, 7 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁵³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Local army graduates to guard Jalalabad airport, 3 districts, 17 January 2021, [url](#)

money towards officials or local power brokers, creating a ‘rentier political marketplace’.²⁹⁵⁴ According to analyst David Mansfield, successful counter narcotics and counterinsurgency campaigns, as well as economic growth, contributed to make Nangarhar a ‘model province’ until 2011.²⁹⁵⁵ Meanwhile, however, the divide between Jalalabad elites and rural communities of the southern part of the province was deepening. The political alliances that had ensured a form of stability earlier also started to crumble.²⁹⁵⁶ Jackson further wrote that the Taliban took advantage of these political rifts, citing Khogyani and Sherzad as the first districts to rally the insurgency, due to political neglect and under-representation.²⁹⁵⁷ The situation worsened at a faster pace after 2013, with the withdrawal of international combat forces. From 2014 on, Mansfield noted a ‘dramatic uptick in levels of violence’, afflicting notably the rural population. By 2016, Nangarhar was ‘in complete disarray’.²⁹⁵⁸ Several districts of Nangarhar experienced ‘continuous displacements’ in 2015-2016, as a result of inter-AGE clashes and military operations.²⁹⁵⁹ In 2017, Nangarhar was the province with the highest numbers of conflict-induced IDPs²⁹⁶⁰, in addition to having over 500 000 Afghans returning from Pakistan in the second half of 2016.²⁹⁶¹

Prior to the political fragmentation of the local government, AAN’s Borhan Osman noted that, from 2007 on, the insurgency experienced a similar process of fragmentation in the southern and south-eastern districts of Nangarhar. The Taliban shadow governors struggled to control their fighters, who engaged in criminal activities, and were unable to fully take advantage of the political and military vacuum in the province. Between 2011 and 2014, Nangarhar had the highest number of violent crimes in the country.²⁹⁶²

In a 2017 academic article investigating the sources of the Taliban’s legitimacy after 2001, London School of Economics’ Florian Weigand, also co-director of the Centre for the Study of Armed Groups²⁹⁶³, highlighted the complexity of the insurgency in Nangarhar province.²⁹⁶⁴ It is indeed composed of a ‘number of armed ‘opposition’ groups with different interests and alliances, sometimes linked to strongmen or to the government, sometimes claiming to be “Taliban” and sometimes only being labelled as “Taliban” by others’.²⁹⁶⁵

Regarding the Taliban, in May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mullah Mohammad Essa, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the shadow governor of Nangarhar. He was

²⁹⁵⁴ Jackson, A., Politics and Governance in Afghanistan: the Case of Nangarhar Province, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, June 2014, [url](#), pp. 6-7, 15

²⁹⁵⁵ Mansfield, D., The Devil is in the Details: Nangarhar’s continued decline into insurgency, violence and widespread drug production, AREU, 29 February 2016, [url](#), p. 2

²⁹⁵⁶ Mansfield, D., The Devil is in the Details: Nangarhar’s continued decline into insurgency, violence and widespread drug production, AREU, 29 February 2016, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6

²⁹⁵⁷ Jackson, A., Politics and Governance in Afghanistan: the Case of Nangarhar Province, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, June 2014, [url](#), p. 26

²⁹⁵⁸ Mansfield, D., The Devil is in the Details: Nangarhar’s continued decline into insurgency, violence and widespread drug production, AREU, 29 February 2016, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6

²⁹⁵⁹ UNHCR, Major situations of conflict-induced displacement in the first months of 2016 –Summary note for Afghanistan Protection Cluster, 24 February 2016, [url](#), p. 2

²⁹⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report; Week of 1 to 7 January 2018, 7 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1

²⁹⁶¹ UNOCHA, 2017 Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview, 9 January 2017, [url](#), p. 11

²⁹⁶² Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#)

²⁹⁶³ ODI, Centre for the Study of Armed Groups: Florian Weigand, n. d., [url](#)

²⁹⁶⁴ Weigand, F., Afghanistan’s Taliban – Legitimate Jihadists or Coercive Extremists?, Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding, 2017, [url](#), p. 369

²⁹⁶⁵ Weigand, F., Afghanistan’s Taliban – Legitimate Jihadists or Coercive Extremists?, Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding, 2017, [url](#), p. 369

appointed after the 'reshuffle' of the Taliban government structure ahead of the 2020 fighting season.²⁹⁶⁶ However, he was reportedly replaced by Mawlawi Neda Mohammad in early 2021.²⁹⁶⁷

According to an Afghanistan analyst interviewed in January 2020 by Sweden's Migration Agency, the Taliban were able to consolidate their presence in areas that they cleared from ISKP and thus were the strongest armed group in Nangarhar.²⁹⁶⁸ In March 2020, AAN's expert Obaid Ali assessed the Taliban's strength as 'weak' in Nangarhar in relation to their capacity to drive out the ISKP, which they eventually did, expanding their control in remote mountainous areas where ISKP had bases.²⁹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the group appeared to take advantage of the withdrawal of US troops from several outposts. It was reported to resume or increase its activities in districts such as Surkhrod²⁹⁷⁰, Achin²⁹⁷¹, Haska Mena²⁹⁷², or Hesarak.²⁹⁷³

This pattern led some civilians and members of the security forces to join the Taliban – not only in rural areas, but also in Nangarhar universities.²⁹⁷⁴ In July 2020, Taliban members interviewed by the Diplomat admitted the presence of foreigners fighting along them in Nangarhar, despite not being actual members of the group, such as Punjabis and Uyghurs in Sherzad district. A Taliban spokesperson denied these claims.²⁹⁷⁵

The Taliban reportedly set up a system of taxation of smuggling goods across eight of Nangarhar's southern districts, Hesarak and Sherzad districts being the local centre of their narcotics activity.²⁹⁷⁶ The UN Security Council indeed suggested that behind the Taliban's determination to dislodge ISKP from Nangarhar was their will to retake control of local smuggling routes and poppy-cultivating areas.²⁹⁷⁷ The Taliban were also said to give money to some tribal leaders every month, in unspecified districts, to ensure their support.²⁹⁷⁸

ISKP has been active in Nangarhar since 2015, when it formally announced its foundation. Originally composed of Pakistani militants who had settled in the south-eastern districts of the province after the Pakistani army had ousted them from the tribal areas, ISKP was later joined by Taliban defectors.²⁹⁷⁹ ISKP benefitted from the weakening of the provincial authorities, infighting between the local Taliban, and the erosion of tribal social structures in Nangarhar (particularly in the

²⁹⁶⁶ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9, 27

²⁹⁶⁷ Tolonews, Taliban Reshuffles Key Posts as New Fighting Season Nears, 6 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁶⁸ Sweden, Lifos/Swedish Migration Agency, Sakerhetsläget i Afghanistan (version 2.0.), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 41

²⁹⁶⁹ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁷⁰ FP, Resurgent Taliban Bode Ill for Afghan Peace, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁷¹ AFP, Afghanistan: à Achin, le retour de la peur après le retrait des troupes américaines [informal translation: In Achin, fear returns after US troops withdrawal], in Yahoo ! Actualités, 14 October 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Concerns Remain Months after US Leaves Base in Nangarhar, 15 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁷² AFP, Afghanistan: à Achin, le retour de la peur après le retrait des troupes américaines [informal translation: In Achin, fear returns after US troops withdrawal], in Yahoo ! Actualités, 14 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁷³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Situation worsens in Hesarak, residents flee homes, 12 November 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁷⁴ FP, Resurgent Taliban Bode Ill for Afghan Peace, 7 July 2020, [url](#); FP, Feeling Abandoned by Kabul, Many Rural Afghans Flock to Join the Taliban, 24 September 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁷⁵ Diplomat (The), The Taliban Say They Have No Foreign Fighters. Is That True?, 10 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁷⁶ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 15

²⁹⁷⁷ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 16-17

²⁹⁷⁸ 1TV, Some tribal elders in Nangarhar are regularly paid by Taliban, 23 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁷⁹ Osman, B., The Islamic State in 'Khorasan': How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar, AAN, 27 July 2016, [url](#)

traditional area of the Shinwari tribe). Local communities were indeed left vulnerable to pressure from local and foreign insurgents.²⁹⁸⁰

AAN's Borhan Osman stated that in terms of territorial control, ISKP was at its most powerful in the summer of 2015, after overrunning the Taliban in 8 of Nangarhar's 22 districts (Achin, Kot, Nazyan, Bati Kot, Deh Bala/Haska Mena, Khogyani, Sherzad, Pachir wa Agam and Chaparhar) – although it never captured their respective centres. Shortly after, faced with Taliban counterattacks and US airstrikes, ISKP's presence started to dwindle and, by the spring of 2017, was restricted to Achin and Deh Bala districts, with its command base located in Achin's Mamand Valley.²⁹⁸¹ ISKP resorted to extreme violence to stay in control of remote areas of Nangarhar, transforming villages into training and logistical centres.²⁹⁸² From the fall of 2019, military operations simultaneously led by ANDSF, coalition forces and the Taliban, pressured the group into leaving the areas under its control in southern Nangarhar and in Kunar.²⁹⁸³ By November 2019, ISKP had been 'nearly eradicated from its main Afghan base in Nangarhar'.²⁹⁸⁴ In this regard, Obaid Ali stressed the importance of ISKP's unpopularity in Nangarhar in its defeat, since it could not rely on locals' support.²⁹⁸⁵

In early and mid-2020, sources reported on the presence of ISKP in Achin, Deh Bala, Khogyani and Pachieragam districts, notably due to the withdrawal of US troops from several outposts.²⁹⁸⁶ According to multiple sources cited by a report published by the project ExTrac²⁹⁸⁷ in November 2020, ISKP was then 'severely restricted in its in-person outreach', even in Nangarhar, where it only maintained contact with the families of its operatives.²⁹⁸⁸ In February 2021, the UN Security Council highlighted the 'degraded combat capability' of ISKP, although it was trying to regain some influence. According to UN estimates, ISKP mustered between 1 000 and 2 200 fighters in Afghanistan and was still present in Achin district. ISKP was also considered a threat in 'urban areas in the east of Afghanistan', among others.²⁹⁸⁹ The New York Times added that its urban cells worked independently from one another, making their dismantlement harder.²⁹⁹⁰ In March 2021, Afghan researcher Abdul Sayed reported on the spread of ISKP attacks in several districts of Nangarhar where it was once the dominant force.²⁹⁹¹ Despite the arrest and/or killing of numerous alleged ISKP fighters and leaders

²⁹⁸⁰ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#); Kazemi, S. R. and Soroush, R., One Land, Two Rules (4): Delivering public services in embattled Achin district in Nangrahar province, AAN, 25 March 2019, [url](#); Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 22

²⁹⁸¹ Osman, B., The Battle for Mamand: ISKP under strain, but not yet defeated, AAN, 23 May 2017, [url](#)

²⁹⁸² Washington Post (The), Afghanistan claims the Islamic State was 'obliterated.' But fighters who got away could stage a resurgence, 9 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁸³ USDOD, Enhancing Security & Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 28

²⁹⁸⁴ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-4; Diplomat (The), Islamic State's Lingering Legacy in Afghanistan, 5 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁸⁵ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁸⁶ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#); AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, [url](#); AFP, Afghanistan: à Achin, le retour de la peur après le retrait des troupes américaines [informal translation, In Achin, fear returns after US troops withdrawal], in Yahoo ! Actualités, 14 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁸⁷ ExTrac studies several 'violent extremist organisations' through tools such as social networks and messaging applications tracking or expert analysis. See: ExTrac, n.d., [url](#)

²⁹⁸⁸ ExTrac, Mapping The Extremist Narrative Landscape In Afghanistan, November 2020, [url](#), p. 31

²⁹⁸⁹ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 14-15

²⁹⁹⁰ New York Times (The), Foes in Afghan War See a Common Threat of Islamic State's Return, 22 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁹¹ Sayed, A., [Twitter], posted on: 3 March 2021, [url](#)

throughout the reporting period, for instance in Chaparhar²⁹⁹², Kama²⁹⁹³ and Surkhrod²⁹⁹⁴, these efforts were deemed as unlikely to remove ISKP and prevent it from conducting deadly attacks.²⁹⁹⁵

In March 2021, the New York Times reported on 'poor and sometimes educated radicalized' urban residents joining ISKP, notably in Jalalabad.²⁹⁹⁶ In this regard, Jalalabad's Nangarhar University was among the three universities which provided ISKP with the most recruits.²⁹⁹⁷ The group was also said to recruit students of Gulf states-backed Salafist *madrasas* in Nangarhar and Kunar.²⁹⁹⁸

As of July 2020, ISKP was described by Stars & Stripes as 'financially hobbled', due to the loss of revenues generated by the control of smuggling routes.²⁹⁹⁹ In a January 2021 report, the US Treasury stated that in Nangarhar, ISKP heavily relied on informal mechanisms, such as *hawalas*, to transfer money.³⁰⁰⁰

As listed by AAN in a 2016 report, other Afghan militant groups operating in some of Nangarhar's districts were then: the Tora Bora Jihadi Front, which was integrated into the mainstream Taliban movement in October 2015; Hezb-e Islami; several Salafi groups; Fedaiy Karwan, a semi-autonomous group within the Taliban movement; and the Siahpushan (meaning 'black-clad and masked'), whose alliance was not clear.³⁰⁰¹ In 2019, a group of the Haqqani Network's 40 fighters was also reportedly involved in the planning of suicide attacks and assassinations in Nangarhar.³⁰⁰²

In February 2021, the UN Security Council listed Nangarhar among the 11 provinces where Al Qaeda, with forces estimated between 200 and 500, was present.³⁰⁰³ UNAMA added that its main tasks consist in 'training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring'.³⁰⁰⁴ The Diplomat observed that in April 2020, Al Qaeda claimed to have supported the Taliban in their fight against ISKP in Nangarhar between August and October 2019.³⁰⁰⁵

As of May 2020, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jaish-e Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LeT) were listed among the foreign groups mostly present in eastern Afghanistan, notably in Nangarhar, under the leadership of the Afghan Taliban.³⁰⁰⁶ TTP's forces were then estimated at 180 fighters situated in Lalpur district, while JeM and LeT respectively numbered 200 and 800 fighters, 'colocated with Taliban forces' in Muhmand Dara, Durbaba and Sherzad districts. These groups reportedly 'act as advisers, trainers and specialists in IEDs', while 'carrying out targeted

²⁹⁹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh shadow governor for Nangarhar killed, 4 December 2020, [url](#); TKG, Four IS/Daesh Fighters Arrested in E. Afghanistan, 31 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Key Daesh member arrested in Nangarhar, 12 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁹⁴ Kabul Now, NDS operatives arrest ISKP's press officer and fighters, 3 October 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁹⁵ VOA, IS Khorasan Able to Stage Attacks Despite Depleted Leadership, Experts Say, 19 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁹⁶ New York Times (The), Foes in Afghan War See a Common Threat of Islamic State's Return, 22 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁹⁹⁷ Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 11

²⁹⁹⁸ FP, In Afghanistan, Religious Schools Are a Breeding Ground for Islamic State Influence, 24 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁹⁹ Stars and Stripes, A bloodied ISIS still a threat in Afghanistan as it looks to recruit disgruntled Taliban, 31 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁰⁰ US Department of Treasury, Operation Inherent Resolve - Summary of Work Performed by the Department of the Treasury Related to Terrorist Financing, ISIS, and Anti-Money Laundering for First Quarter Fiscal Year 2021, 4 January 2021, [url](#), p. 4

³⁰⁰¹ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#)

³⁰⁰² Khaama Press, Prominent Haqqani Network commander arrested in Jalalabad city, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁰³ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 15

³⁰⁰⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 85-86

³⁰⁰⁵ Diplomat (The), The Taliban and al-Qaeda: Enduring Partnership or Liability?, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁰⁶ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 20

assassinations against government officials and others'.³⁰⁰⁷ In 2020, former TTP fighters who had defected to ISKP 'returned to their old TTP networks, in Kunar, or Nangrahar or in Pakistan'.³⁰⁰⁸ In August 2020, as they decided to join forces again with TTP, which they had splintered from³⁰⁰⁹, Jamaat ul-Ahrar (JuA) and Hezb-ul Ahrar (HuA) were reported to maintain a strong presence in Kunar and Nangrahar provinces.³⁰¹⁰ However, in a March 2021 report, the Diplomat magazine stated that the TTP had relocated from Kunar and Nangrahar provinces to Paktika's Bermal district.³⁰¹¹ Lashkar-e Islam (LeI) is said to operate in Nazyan district since at least 2008.³⁰¹² In January 2021, security sources announced the death of its leader, Mangal Bagh, in a mine blast in Nazyan.³⁰¹³

Despite a decrease of the area under poppy cultivation in Nangrahar in 2020 (-27 %)³⁰¹⁴, following an 'unprecedented' decrease in 2019 (-82 %), due to both falling prices and ongoing conflict³⁰¹⁵, a May 2020 UN Security Council report mentioned that narcotic networks were still active in Nangrahar and smuggled drugs into Pakistan 'with the reported acquiescence of security officials'.³⁰¹⁶ Tolonews also reported on the illegal mining of precious and semi-precious stones in Goshta district.³⁰¹⁷

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Nangrahar province decreased by 27 %.³⁰¹⁸

In terms of the presence of government security forces, as of December 2020, Nangrahar province was under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US forces.³⁰¹⁹ In January 2021, over 400 soldiers were deployed in Kot, Achin and Durbaba districts to improve local security.³⁰²⁰ In 2017, Nangrahar reportedly numbered 18 ALP units – more than any other province –, although in 2019, AAN could not verify that all of them were actually active.³⁰²¹ In a 2020 report, AAN also noted the presence of 8 newly established ANA-TF units, along with NDS-backed 'uprising forces'³⁰²², in 10 districts of Nangrahar (among which Achin, Khogyani, Nazyan, Pachieragam and Sherzad³⁰²³), where 'they appeared to be much more visible and active than the ALP'.³⁰²⁴ The ANA-TF's popularity is also correlated with the

³⁰⁰⁷ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 20

³⁰⁰⁸ Ali, O. and Gharanai, K., Hit from Many Sides (2): The demise of ISKP in Kunar, AAN, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁰⁹ Abbas, H., Extremism and Terrorism Trends in Pakistan: Changing Dynamics and New Challenges, CTC Sentinel, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Vol. 14, Issue 2, February 2021, February 2021, [url](#)

³⁰¹⁰ Diplomat (The), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan Reunifies with Uncertain Consequences, 18 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁰¹¹ Diplomat (The), The Pakistani Taliban is Back, 9 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁰¹² Diplomat (The), The Taliban Say They Have No Foreign Fighters. Is That True?, 10 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁰¹³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Pakistani Militant Leader Killed In Afghanistan, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁰¹⁴ UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020: Cultivation and Production – Executive Summary, April 2021, [url](#), p. 9

³⁰¹⁵ Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁰¹⁶ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 15

³⁰¹⁷ Tolonews, Report Shows Illegal Mining in Nangrahar, 28 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁰¹⁸ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³⁰¹⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 5

³⁰²⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Local army graduates to guard Jalalabad airport, 3 districts, 17 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁰²¹ Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN and GPPI, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 37, 89

³⁰²² For more information, see: Chapter [1.2. Actors in the conflict](#)

³⁰²³ Le Monde, A Nangrahar, au sein d'une milice coincée entre l'EI et les talibans [In Nangrahar, inside a militia wedged between IS and the Taliban], 27 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁰²⁴ Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN and GPPI, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 40, 75

local resentment towards ISKP.³⁰²⁵ The official disbandment of the ALP in September 2020 prompted concerns over the risk of its former members joining AGEs, as ‘the safer option for some’.³⁰²⁶

According to a Human Rights Watch report, in 2019, the 02-Unit of NDS Special Forces (‘NDS-02’) was operating in Nangarhar. It was reported to have killed civilians during counter-terrorism operations under the supervision of the CIA.³⁰²⁷

US troops started to evacuate their bases in Achin’s Mohmand Valley and in Haska Mena in November 2019, handing them over to the Afghan forces in July 2020. This left some ANDSF members worried over the loss of US aerial support.³⁰²⁸ However, as of March 2020, the US command announced its intention to keep the Jalalabad military base open, along six others in the country.³⁰²⁹

A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021³⁰³⁰ estimated that 86.31 % of Nangarhar’s territory (1.5 million inhabitants) were under government control, 13.27 % (189 712 inhabitants) under Taliban control, and less than 1 % (6 009 inhabitants) controlled by neither side.³⁰³¹

AAN’s Obaid Ali noted that, after their respective operations against ISKP in late 2019, both the Taliban and the Afghan government had expanded their control in Nangarhar – the former in the ‘remote, mountainous parts where ISKP had most of its remaining bases’, the latter in lower-altitude areas. According to Ali, as of March 2020, the government ‘almost entirely’ controlled 10 out of Nangarhar’s 22 districts (Achin, Batikot, Behsud, Dara-i Nur, Durbaba, Kama, Kot, Muhmand Dara, Pachieragam and Shinwar) and ruled about 70-80 % of 8 other districts (Chaparhar, Deh Bala, Goshta, Kuzkunar, Lalpur, Nazyan, Rodat and Spinghar). The remaining districts were reported to be under the Taliban or Pakistani AGE’s control, with the Taliban being the dominant force in Hesarak, Khogyani, Sherzad and Surkhrod, where ANDSF were only present in the district centres and their surroundings.³⁰³²

According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, the Taliban shut down health clinics in Hesarak, Khogyani, Lalpur, Sherzad and Surkhrod in January 2020, indicating that they control these districts. LWJ also assessed Achin, Batikot, Chaparhar, Dara-e Nur, Dehbala, Nazyan, Pachieragam, Rodat and Shinwar as ‘contested’. The remaining districts are presented as undetermined or government controlled. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Hesarak, Khogyani, Lalpur, Sherzad and Surkhrod districts remained under the ‘Taliban control’ and Mohmandara and Durbaba and Behsud were added to ‘contested’³⁰³³

While the 2021 Pajhwok survey also presented Sherzad and Hesarak districts as under Taliban control³⁰³⁴, they were both allegedly recaptured in February 2021 following ANDSF operations.³⁰³⁵ In

³⁰²⁵ Clark, K. et al., Afghanistan’s Newest Local Defence Force: Were “all the mistakes of the ALP” turned into ANA-TF safeguards?, AAN, August 2020, [url](#), pp. 30, 35

³⁰²⁶ FP, Resurgent Taliban Bode Ill for Afghan Peace, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁰²⁷ HRW, “They’ve Shot Many Like This” Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁰²⁸ Tolonews, US Forces Exit 2 Bases in Nangarhar: Local Officials, 22 July 2020, [url](#); AFP, Afghanistan: à Achin, le retour de la peur après le retrait des troupes américaines [informal translation, In Achin, fear returns after US troops withdrawal], in Yahoo ! Actualités, 14 October 2020, [url](#) ; Tolonews, Concerns Remain Months after US Leaves Base in Nangarhar, 15 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁰²⁹ New York Times (The), Afghanistan War Enters New Stage as U.S. Military Prepares to Exit, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁰³⁰ For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country.

³⁰³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁰³² Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁰³³ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., [url](#) However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

³⁰³⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁰³⁵ Tolonews, Opium Poppy Farming Ongoing in Nangarhar District, 23 February 2021, [url](#) ; Afghanistan Times, Commando Forces Conquer Taliban’s Largest Command Center in Nangarhar, 2 March 2021, [url](#)

January 2021, Afghan forces claimed that they had cleared off Muhmand Dara district from the Taliban.³⁰³⁶

2.23.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 576 civilian casualties (190 deaths and 386 injured) in Nangarhar. Although this represents a decrease of 46 % compared to 2019, the province ranked third in this regard. In 2020, leading causes of casualties were suicide attacks, followed by non-suicide IEDs and ground engagements.³⁰³⁷ As for Resolute Support, it recorded between 101 and 125 civilian casualties in Nangarhar in the first quarter of 2020. In the second quarter of 2020, RS indicated Nangarhar as the province that experienced the highest number of civilian casualties countrywide, with 259 civilian casualties recorded. This represents a 236 % increase compared to the previous quarter.³⁰³⁸ Such data for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.³⁰³⁹

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data on 479 violent events in Nangarhar province from open sources: 294 coded as 'battles' (61 %), 159 as 'explosions/remote violence' (33 %) and 26 as 'violence against civilians' (6 %).³⁰⁴⁰

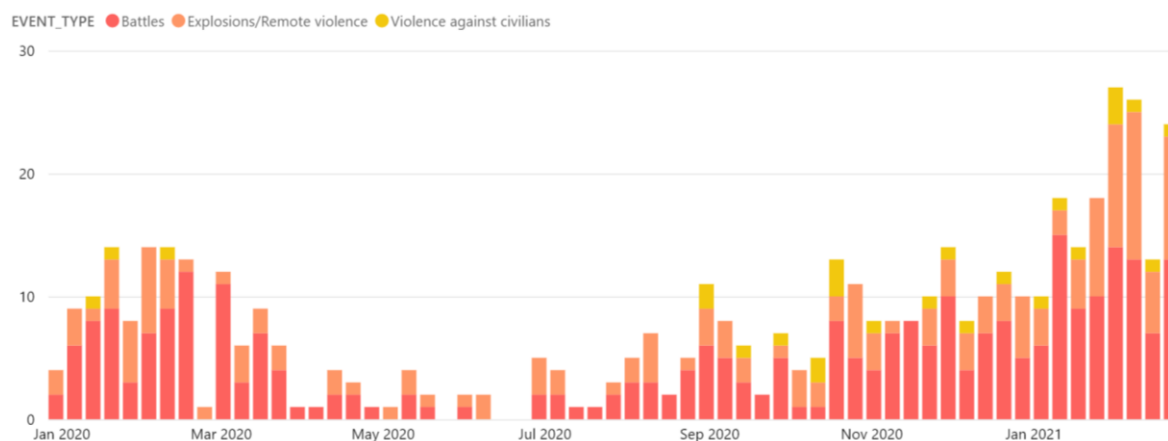


Figure 46: Nangarhar province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³⁰⁴¹

³⁰³⁶ Afghanistan, MoD, 11 Taliban Terrorists Were Killed In Achin District Of Nangarhar Province!, 20 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁰³⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

³⁰³⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 71-72

³⁰³⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁴⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nangarhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁴¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nangarhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

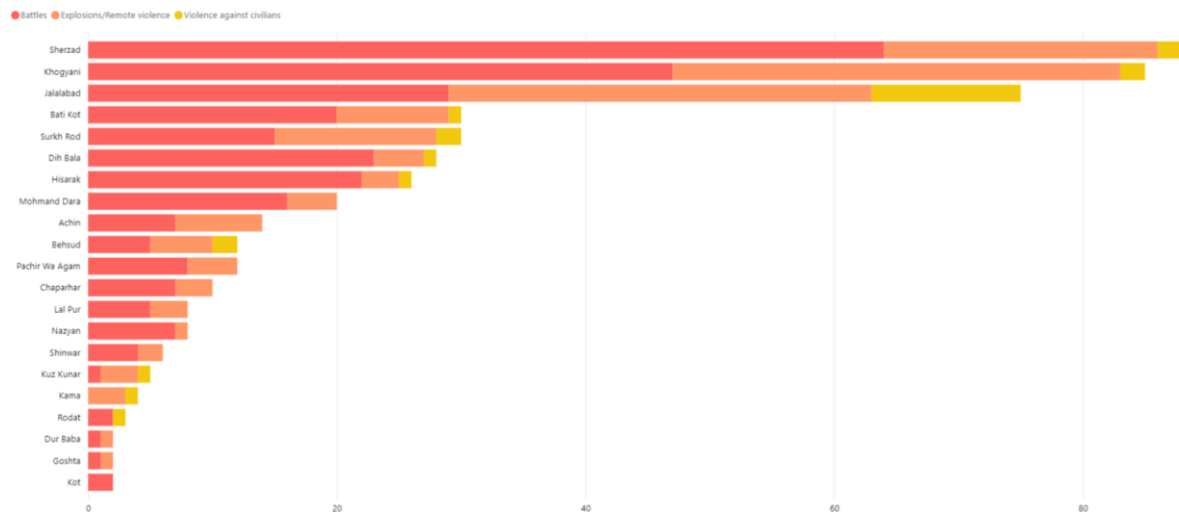


Figure 47: Nangarhar province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³⁰⁴²

Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, an overwhelming majority of them were ‘armed clashes’. The Taliban initiated two thirds of them, followed by ANDSF (76), ISKP (10) and unidentified armed groups (10). In decreasing order, Jalalabad, Khogyani, Sherzad, Batikot, Deh Bala (Haska Mena), and Hesarak were the most affected districts by this type of violence. The highest numbers were recorded in the first and last quarters of 2020 as well as in January/February 2021, with a very sharp drop between April and July 2020. Hesarak, Khogyani and Sherzad accounted for about half of the increase in clashes recorded during the first months of 2021.³⁰⁴³ Such events included, on 16 September 2020, a series of attacks launched by the Taliban on security checkpoints in Hesarak, Khogyani and Sherzad districts, killing 20 ANDSF members and enduring 29 deaths in their ranks.³⁰⁴⁴ Hesarak district witnessed multiple operations in November and December 2020.³⁰⁴⁵ In January 2021, the Taliban attacked a military base in Sherzad district, killing at least 14 Afghan soldiers.³⁰⁴⁶ UNAMA noted that in 2020, Nangarhar was one of the provinces where an increase in civilian casualties from ground engagements was recorded.³⁰⁴⁷

As for Behsud, Durbaba, Goshta, Kama, Kot, Kuzkunar, Lalpur, Rodat and Shinwar districts, each one of them recorded five or less armed clashes.³⁰⁴⁸ During an attack launched upon a government compound in Shinwar in October 2020, 19 civilians were killed and 51 other injured. Although UNAMA attributed this event to the Taliban, other sources stated that no group had endorsed it.³⁰⁴⁹

³⁰⁴² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nangarhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 9 events (8 battles and 1 remote violence) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

³⁰⁴³ ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nangarhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁴⁴ Khaama Press, 20 Afghan Armies Killed In Nangarhar Battles, 17 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁴⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 15 insurgents killed in Nangarhar raids, 14 November 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban Suffer Heavy Loss in MoD Operations, 23 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁴⁶ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Claims Car Bombing That Killed At Least 14 Afghan Troops, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁴⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72

³⁰⁴⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nangarhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁴⁹ AP, Officials: Suicide attack kills 13 in eastern Afghanistan, 3 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 46

ISKP carried out most of its attacks against ANDSF in Jalalabad. The main one took place on 2-3 August 2020, when, following a car bomb explosion at the entrance, gunmen attacked the provincial prison, killing about 30 people and wounding 50. Hundreds of prisoners were able to escape.³⁰⁵⁰

In its February 2021 assessment based on several criteria, including conflict severity and spread, UNOCHA ranked five Nangarhar districts among the 100 'hardest to reach' of the country: Sherzad (n°14), Hesarak (n°16), Khogyani (n°26), Muhmand Dara (n°71) and Pachieragam (n°91).³⁰⁵¹ The last two were not listed in the previous assessment, published in August 2020.³⁰⁵²

In August and September 2020, tensions were reported between Pakistani and Afghan forces, in Durbaba and Muhmand Dara districts, over the fencing of the border by Pakistan. In Muhmand Dara, after 18 days of fighting, construction work resumed in Afghan territory seized by Pakistani troops.³⁰⁵³

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as 'Explosions/Remote violence', the most represented sub-category was clearly 'Remote explosive/Landmine/IED' (65 %). Jalalabad district recorded the highest numbers (32), followed by Khogyani (21) and Sherzad (10).³⁰⁵⁴ For example, in July 2020, an unclaimed car bomb blast killed four persons and wounded 11 in Jalalabad.³⁰⁵⁵ In similar incidents, a total of 8 civilians were killed in Khogyani district in late 2020 and early 2021.³⁰⁵⁶ Such devices also killed several children, in Dehbala, Kot and Pachieragam districts, respectively in June, July and September 2020.³⁰⁵⁷

The 32 ANDSF/NATO-initiated 'Air/drone strikes' documented by ACLED appeared to be equally spread over the reporting period, 24 of them occurring in Khogyani, Sherzad and Achin districts. According to ACLED data, the remaining 8 strikes took place in Deh Bala, Hesarak, Mohmand Dara, Pachieragam and Surkhrod districts, while Nangarhar's 11 other districts were not affected by this type of violence.³⁰⁵⁸ Also of note is the killing of six civilians by a mortar fired by the ANA, in September 2020 in Sherzad district.³⁰⁵⁹

ACLED coded four other events as 'Suicide bomb' attacks across three districts (Behsud, Kuzkunar and Sherzad).³⁰⁶⁰ In Kuzkunar, on 12 May 2020, in a suicide attack carried out by ISKP during the funerals of a pro-government militia commander, 33 civilians were killed and 133 wounded.³⁰⁶¹ In July 2020, in the same area, an unclaimed suicide car attack against the convoy of a police commander caused 15 casualties.³⁰⁶²

³⁰⁵⁰ New York Times (The), 29 Dead After ISIS Attack on Afghan Prison, 3 August 2020, [url](#); FP, Indians and Central Asians Are the New Face of the Islamic State, 8 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁵¹ UNOCHA, Hard-To-Reach Districts, February 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁵² UNOCHA, Hard To Reach Districts, August 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁵³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 July - 2 August 2020), 7 September 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Pakistani forces resume fencing in Momandara district, 22 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁵⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nangarhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁵⁵ Reuters, Taliban suicide bomber kills three as violence rises despite peace push, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁵⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 26 November 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 civilians killed in Nangarhar blast, 13 December 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 – 24 January 2021), 27 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁵⁷ Khaama Press, 2 children killed, wounded in an explosion in Nangarhar province, 1 June 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 – 12 July 2020), 15 July 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 3 Civilians Killed, 1 Wounded in Nangarhar IED Blast, 3 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁵⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nangarhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁵⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Third Quarter Report: 1 January to 30 September 2020, 13 December 2020, [url](#), p. 13

³⁰⁶⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nangarhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁶¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁶² AP, Suicide bombing, attack in Afghanistan kill 7 policemen, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

Finally, Jalalabad accounted for almost half of the violent events against civilians (12). None of the other districts recorded more than 2 of these incidents. ACLED attributed 14 of 26 events to unidentified armed groups, 9 to ANDSF and their NATO allies, and 3 to ISKP.³⁰⁶³ In February 2020, a NATO airstrike killed 8 civilians in Surkhrod district.³⁰⁶⁴ Besides, January 2020 and March 2021, several civilians were reportedly killed by the NDS special forces 02-Unit during raids in Khogyani district.³⁰⁶⁵

Pertaining to the specific case of Jalalabad district, a Western senior analyst, interviewed in 2017 by Belgium's CEDOCA, stated that the criminality in the provincial capital had been increasing since at least 2016.³⁰⁶⁶ In August 2020, International Crisis Group's analyst Andrew Watkins highlighted the vulnerability of Jalalabad. Indeed, its proximity to the Pakistani border makes attacks on the city easier, 'in terms of logistics and local support'.³⁰⁶⁷ Over the reporting period, Jalalabad district accounted for 16 % of violent events recorded by ACLED.³⁰⁶⁸ In February 2021, Pajhwok reported that, during the course of the past month, a wave of targeted killings, explosions and armed clashes had caused more than 100 casualties, most of them civilians.³⁰⁶⁹ Despite the adoption of new security measures³⁰⁷⁰ and the dismantlement of Taliban³⁰⁷¹ and ISKP³⁰⁷² urban cells, a Nangarhar provincial council's member criticised the authorities' response as 'symbolic'.³⁰⁷³ UNAMA noted that in 2020, along with Kabul, Jalalabad bore the largest brunt of ISKP-initiated violence against civilians.³⁰⁷⁴ However, journalist Franz J. Marty observed that, apart from the aforementioned attack on Nangarhar's provincial prison in August 2020, 'none of the other [ISKP] attacks had a major impact'.³⁰⁷⁵ Cases of children abduction by criminal networks were also reported.³⁰⁷⁶

Jalalabad was the scene of multiple attacks on journalists and civil activists. In December 2020, Malalai Maiwand, a well-known journalist and an activist for the rights of Afghan women and children, was killed with her driver.³⁰⁷⁷ According to Reuters, Islamic State took responsibility for the

³⁰⁶³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nangarhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁶⁴ RFE/RL, Eight Afghan Civilians Killed In Air Strike [Source: AFP and Reuters], 15 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁶⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 69 ; Feroz, E., [Twitter], posted on : 11 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁶⁶ Belgium, CEDOCA, COI Focus – Afghanistan - Veiligheidssituatie in Jalalabad, Behsud en Surkhrod [Security Situation in Jalalabad, Behsud and Surkhrod], 12 March 2020, [url](#), p. 16

³⁰⁶⁷ VOA, Islamic State Attack on Afghan Prison Lasts 20 Hours, Kills 29, 3 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁶⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nangarhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁶⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Nangarhar: 103 people suffer casualties in a month, 16 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁷⁰ Etilaatroz, ننگرهار کې د داعش او نورو وسله والو ځپل؛ چارواکي یې لامل د امنیتي پېښو مخنیوي نوي تدابیر یادوي [informal translation: ISIL and other militants crushed in Nangarhar Officials cite new security measures as the reason], 15 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁷¹ Etilaatroz, جلال اباد ښار کې ملي امنیت د وسله والو طالبانو د ښاري شبکې مشر نیولی [informal translation: In Jalalabad, the National Directorate of Security (NDS) arrested the leader of the Taliban's urban network], 8 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁷² RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan troops kill senior Islamic State militant, 2 August 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Afghan Police Seize Four Tonnes Of Bomb-Making Chemical, 29 September 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh recruitment head detained in Jalalabad, 28 December 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 Daesh fighter killed, 2 detained in Jalalabad, 13 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁷³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Nangarhar: 103 people suffer casualties in a month, 16 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁷⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 18

³⁰⁷⁵ Swiss Institute for Global Affairs, The Opaque Remnants of the Self-Declared Islamic State in Afghanistan, 30 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁷⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Boy rescued, 5 kidnappers detained in Nangarhar, 17 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁷⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan Journalist Is Killed in Latest Attack on Media Figures, 10 December 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Gunmen Kill TV Anchorwoman In Eastern Afghanistan, 10 December 2020, [url](#); VOA, Right to Be Informed Under Attack in 2020, Media Expert Says, 31 December 2020, [url](#)

murder.³⁰⁷⁸ In January 2021, security forces allegedly prevented the killing of another journalist, also in Jalalabad.³⁰⁷⁹ In October 2020, another activist was shot dead in the city.³⁰⁸⁰

As for government officials, local public figures and scholars attacked in Jalalabad district, UNAMA notably mentioned the killing of a Sufi cleric, in December 2020. The religiously motivated murder was attributed to ISKP.³⁰⁸¹ In two distinct events in early 2020, unknown armed men shot two members of the provincial appeals court and a provincial court judge in Jalalabad. According to Associated Press (AP), ISKP claimed the second attack.³⁰⁸² Two other government workers were shot dead in the city in January 2021.³⁰⁸³

Sources reported on the killing of tribal elders in other parts of the province: in Kama district, in October 2020³⁰⁸⁴, in Behsud district, in December 2020³⁰⁸⁵, and in Khiwa (Kuzkunar) district, in January 2021.³⁰⁸⁶

While the WHO recorded no killing or injuring of health care workers between 28 January and 23 May 2020³⁰⁸⁷, it was reported on 21 January 2020 that the Taliban had closed all health centres in Sherzad, Hesarak, Khogyani, Surkhrod and Lalpur districts. The group argued that it was a retaliatory measure against the closure of health centres by the authorities in their areas.³⁰⁸⁸ Fifteen health centres were reopened a month later in Khogyani, Surkhrod, Lalpur, Muhmand Dara and Achin districts, while others remained closed.³⁰⁸⁹ During the third quarter of 2020, Nangarhar was still one of the provinces where some health facilities had to be temporarily closed, due to ongoing fighting.³⁰⁹⁰ In April 2020, the Taliban wounded eight civilians (including a doctor) when a bomb detonated inside a pharmacy, whose owner had refused paying them money.³⁰⁹¹ In July 2020, the Taliban also abducted three employees of a health NGO in Hesarak.³⁰⁹² Pro-government forces were also involved in violence against health professionals – for instance, ANDSF members threatened the personnel of the Khogyani public hospital in April 2020.³⁰⁹³

Regarding threats to education in Nangarhar, UNAMA mentioned that ISKP had wounded a teacher in August 2020. The teacher had publicly criticized ISKP, the report added.³⁰⁹⁴ In February 2021, a private school principal was killed in an unclaimed attack in the 6th district of Jalalabad.³⁰⁹⁵

In October 2020, Pajhwok stated that AGEs had dynamited a bridge in Surkhrod district, isolating residents from Hesarak, Khogyani, Sherzad and Surkhrod districts.³⁰⁹⁶ However, in March 2021,

³⁰⁷⁸ Reuters, Islamic State claims killing of female TV presenter in Afghanistan, 10 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁷⁹ Etilaatroz, شو غوښتلو په تور ونيول شو [informal translation: A man has been arrested in Nangarhar for trying to kill a journalist], 4 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁸⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁸¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 56

³⁰⁸² Khaama Press, ANP Special Operations Claim 3 IS-K Militants in Nangarhar, 13 January 2021, [url](#); AP, Crime, conflict, chaos crushing Afghan hopes for tomorrow, 4 February 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁸³ Khaama Press, 2 killed, 5 wounded in separate incidents: Nangarhar, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁸⁴ Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 2 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁸⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 26 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁸⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁸⁷ World Health Organization, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (January 28, 2020 – May 23, 2020, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁸⁸ Tolonews, Taliban Closes Health Centers In Nangarhar Districts, 21 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (3 February – 9 February 2020), 12 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: HAG Quarterly Report (July to September 2020), 25 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 36

³⁰⁹² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 58

³⁰⁹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Special Report : Attacks on Healthcare during the COVID-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

³⁰⁹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 38

³⁰⁹⁵ Etilaatroz, لال اباد ښار کې ناپېژنده وسله والو د يو خصوصي ښوونځي مدير وژلی [informal translation: Unidentified gunmen kill a private school principal in Jalalabad], 4 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Bridge linking 4 Nangarhar districts blown up, 18 October 2020, [url](#)

ANDSF announced the full reopening of the 75 kilometres-long road connecting Hesarak and Sherzad districts to the rest of the province. Both districts were described as ‘not accessible by land’ for the last ten to twelve years.³⁰⁹⁷

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 44 772 persons displaced from Nangarhar – the second highest provincial numbers recorded over the period. An overwhelming majority of these IDPs were displaced within the province. Only 28 people were headed to Kabul. It is worth noting that 25 000 of Nangarhar’s IDPs were displaced in January 2021, mostly from Sherzad.³⁰⁹⁸ This can be linked to clashes between ANDSF and AGEs, notably affecting civilians in Hesarak, Khogyani, Sherzad and Surkhrod.³⁰⁹⁹

During the same period, 5 185 persons were displaced to Nangarhar from other provinces, 92 % of them hailing from neighbouring Kunar. Other were displaced from Helmand, Paktya, Laghman, Kapisa and, for a few dozens of people, from Takhar, Logar, Parwan, Kabul and Kunduz.³¹⁰⁰

Overall, the main districts of origin of IDPs were Sherzad (28 857) and Muhmand Dara (8 169), distantly followed by Hesarak (4 175) and Khogyani (3 061). The four of them accounted for 98.8 % of Nangarhar’s IDPs.³¹⁰¹ Massive waves of displacements in Sherzad districts were linked to ongoing fighting in early 2020 (5 600 people)³¹⁰², November 2020 (600)³¹⁰³, and especially in January 2021.³¹⁰⁴ Conflict also displaced several other thousands of people in Muhmand Dara and Khogyani in early 2020.³¹⁰⁵

Surkhrod district was the main destination of IDPs (18 466), while Khogyani (6 653), Behsud (6 032), Sherzad (4 340), Jalalabad (4 009), and Shinwar (3 528) each hosted over 3 000 IDPs. IDPs from Kunar mainly settled in Nangarhar’s neighbouring districts, such as Behsud and Kuzkunar.³¹⁰⁶

³⁰⁹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, After 11 years, road to Hesarak reopens, 26 March 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, Nangarhar: ANDSF Clears Road to District Cut Off for 12 Years, 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 5 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁰⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (11 – 17 January 2021), 19 January 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (1 – 7 February 2021), 10 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 5 April 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 5 April 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁰² UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (3 February – 9 February 2020), 12 February 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 – 22 November 2020), 25 November 2020, [url](#)

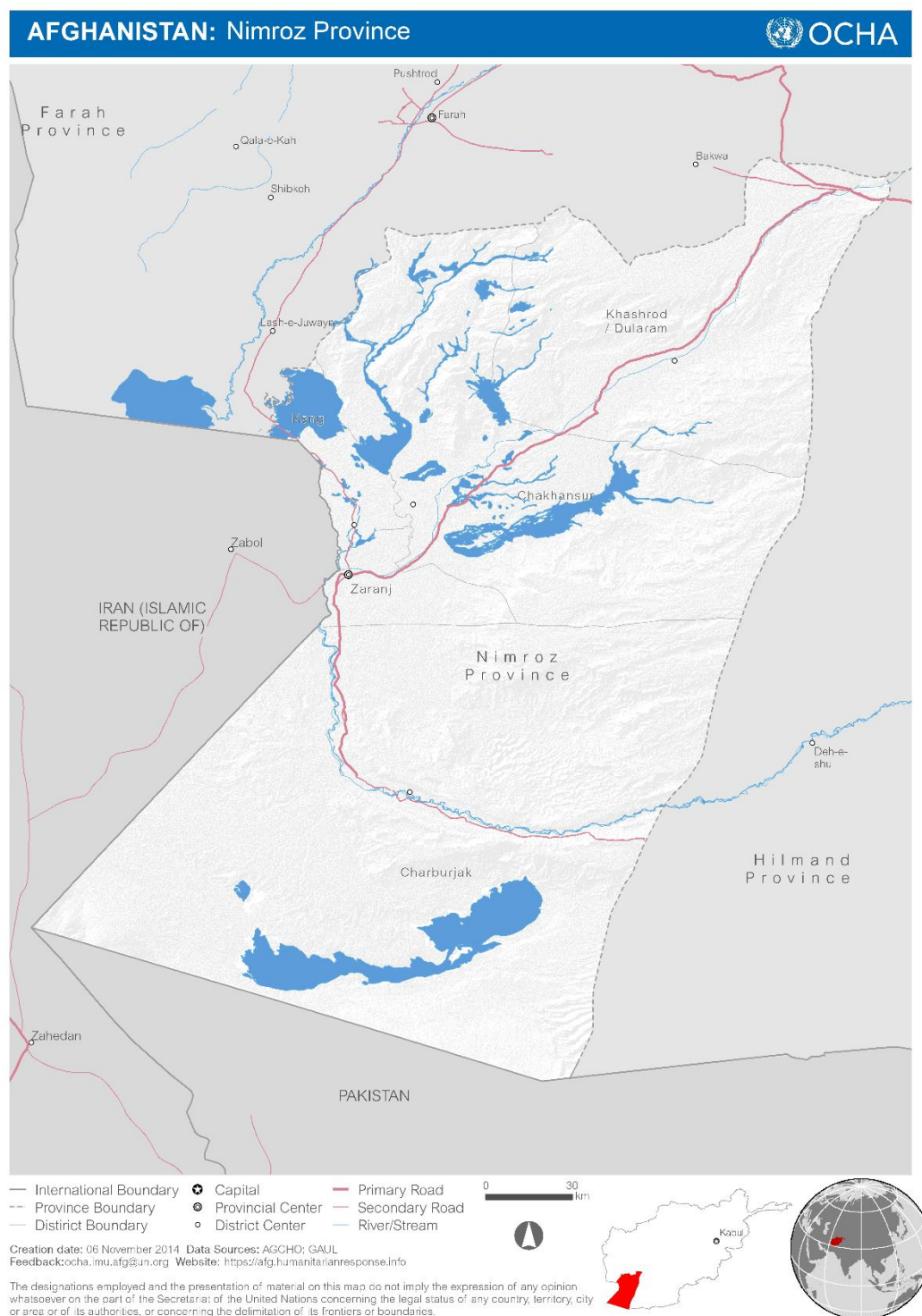
³¹⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (11 – 17 January 2021), 19 January 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 – 31 January 2021), 3 February 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 January – 12 January 2020), 15 January 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (3 February – 9 February 2020), 12 February 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 5 April 2021, [url](#)

2.24 Nimroz

2.24.1 General description of the province



Map 24: Afghanistan – Nimroz province, source: UNOCHA³¹⁰⁷

³¹⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 23

Nimroz province is located in the south-west of Afghanistan, alongside the border with Iran and Pakistan³¹⁰⁸ and Nimroz is divided into the following districts: provincial capital Zaranj, Kang, Asle-e Chakhansur, Char Burjak, Khashrod and Dularam (temporary district).³¹⁰⁹

According to estimates for 2029-2020 by NSIA, Nimroz has a population of 180 200 with 63 992 living in the provincial capital Zaranj. The urban population constitutes about 16,5 % of all inhabitants.³¹¹⁰

The population is composed mainly of Balochs, followed by Pashtuns, Tajiks³¹¹¹, Brahuis and Uzbeks. Balochs living in Afghanistan are primarily nomadic.³¹¹²

The province is of strategic importance for the border crossing trade and smuggling because of its proximity to Iran and Pakistan.³¹¹³ A national highway, starting from Dularam and intersecting Highway One, passes through the districts of Khashrod, Asle-e Chakhansur and Zaranj; it leads to Zaranj City, at the Afghan-Iranian border.³¹¹⁴ The route through Zaranj-Milak border crossing leads to Chabahar port in Iran, the nearest port from the Afghan borders.³¹¹⁵ The city of Zaranj hosts an airport, which was served by domestic scheduled passenger flights.³¹¹⁶

The Zaranj–Dularam road and the south-western highways have been used as transit routes for drugs and human trafficking.³¹¹⁷ Moreover, Taliban militants purportedly set up checkpoints along the Zaranj-Dularam Highway and charged taxes on vehicles carrying goods.³¹¹⁸

Nimroz has become the primary route for people leaving the country, and they usually spend a few days in Zaranj City in very harsh conditions with little food or other basic facilities, waiting for the possibility to cross the border to Iran, and further to Europe. Afghans were also deported from Iran on a daily basis through the border crossing in Nimroz.³¹¹⁹

2.24.2 Conflict background and actors in Nimroz

According AREU report published in 2020, due to its strategic, border position between Iran and Pakistan, Nimroz is an important centre for legal and illegal cross-border trade and smuggling drugs and people. It makes an abundant source of income both for Taliban, the Afghan authorities and different political groups in both neighbouring countries which compete with each other for control over this trade.³¹²⁰ However, according to AREU, Nimroz has been one of the safest provinces of Afghanistan till now.³¹²¹

Nimroz is also a place of cultivation, production and smuggling drugs: heroin but also increasingly methamphetamine.³¹²² The drug labs were repeatedly targeted by USFOR-A in 2018 and 2019 in order to limit Taliban revenues from drug trade but airstrikes caused a lot of civilian victims.³¹²³

³¹⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d., [url](#)

³¹⁰⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 44

³¹¹⁰ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 40

³¹¹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d., [url](#)

³¹¹² US Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

³¹¹³ AREU, Cross-border Production and Trade, 13 September 2020, [url](#), IWPR, Drugs Trade Thrives in Afghan Province, 19 February 2018, [url](#);

³¹¹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 23

³¹¹⁵ Kabul Now, What factors lay behind recent violence in Nimroz?, 31 October 2020, [url](#)

³¹¹⁶ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Inrikesflyg I Afghanistan, 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 12

³¹¹⁷ IWPR, Drugs Trade Thrives in Afghan Province, 19 February 2018, [url](#)

³¹¹⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban running 'customs check-point' on Nimroz road, 20 January 2018, [url](#)

³¹¹⁹ Tolonews, Nimroz Identified As Key Human Trafficking Route, 13 September 2018, [url](#)

³¹²⁰ AREU, Cross-border Production and Trade, 13 September 2020, [url](#), pp 22-23

³¹²¹ AREU, Cross-border Production and Trade, 13 September 2020, [url](#), p. 41

³¹²² AREU, Cross-border Production and Trade, 13 September 2020, [url](#), pp 22-23

³¹²³ AREU, Cross-border Production and Trade, 13 September 2020, [url](#), p. 23

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Nimroz province increased by 46 %.³¹²⁴

There was also a dispute between Iran and Afghanistan over water access as Afghan government resumed the construction of Kamal Khan dam in Char Burjak, Nimroz province. Some local officials accused Iran of paying insurgents for carrying out attacks on the dam.³¹²⁵ The building site was a target of multiple attacks in the past. According to official data, quoted by Andalou Agency, during last two years, it was attacked 35 times and at least 39 guards were killed.³¹²⁶ In terms of government security forces' presence, Nimroz province is under the responsibility of the 215th ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southwest (TF Southwest), led by US forces.³¹²⁷ However, national security and military presence in the province was reported to be weak, apart from the neighborhood of Char Burjak Kamal Khan's dam building site where a high number of different security forces was protecting the site.³¹²⁸

According to Nimroz governor, Sayed Wali Sultan, there are also about 200 fighters of Al Qaida in the province who closely cooperate with Taliban, helping it to 'use advanced tactics and carry out terrorist attacks'.³¹²⁹ In December 2020, NDS allegedly arrested three Al Qaida members in Nimroz province. They were accused of attacks at Kamal Khan Dam and they were going to prepare some target killings in Zaranj city.³¹³⁰

A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021 designed 73.33% of Nimroz territory and population under government control, 26.67% of territory and population under Taliban control.³¹³¹ According to the Long War Journal, as of February and May 2021, most districts in the province were 'contested', apart from the district centres and the province capital, Zaranj which were under governmental control.³¹³²

2.24.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 51 civilian casualties (24 deaths and 27 injured) in Nimroz province. This represents a decrease of 18 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, non-suicide IEDs followed by escalation of force.³¹³³

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED reported a total of 88 security incidents in Nimroz province, of which 63 were coded as 'battles' and 25 as 'remote violence'.³¹³⁴

³¹²⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³¹²⁵ Kabul Now, What factors lay behind recent violence in Nimruz?, 31 October 2020, [url](#); Los Angeles Times, God, gas and heroin. Now, the fight's over water, 6 February 2020, [url](#); Guardian (The), Dam project promises water – but also conflict – for dusty Afghan border lands, 22 March 2017, [url](#)

³¹²⁶ Andalou Agency, Decades in making, Afghan mega dam opens on Iran border, 24 March 2021, [url](#)

³¹²⁷ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

³¹²⁸ AREU, Cross-border Production and Trade, 13 September 2020, [url](#), p. 13, 41

³¹²⁹ Salaam Times, Al-Qaeda and Taliban collaborate in Nimroz in breach of peace agreement 06 August 2020, [url](#)

³¹³⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 key Al-Qaeda members arrested in Nimroz, 6 December 2020 w: [url](#)

³¹³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³¹³² LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

³¹³³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

³¹³⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nimroz province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

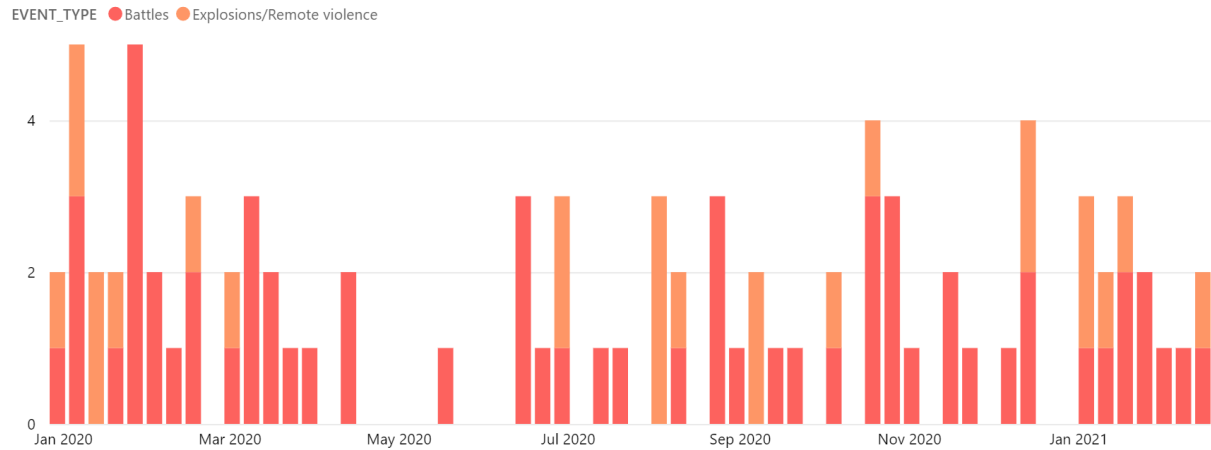


Figure 48: Nimroz province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2020, based on ACLED data³¹³⁵

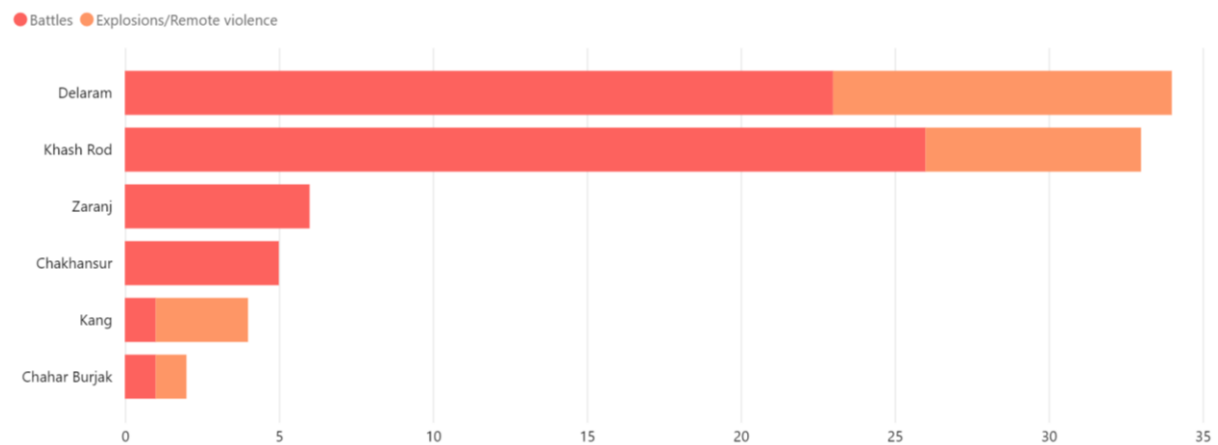


Figure 49: Nimroz province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2020, based on ACLED data³¹³⁶

The situation in the province suddenly worsened in the second part of 2020 when Taliban attacked many security outposts in Nimroz, killing dozens of soldiers and policemen, including guards responsible for protection Kamal Khan dam's building site.³¹³⁷ According to locals interviewed by newspaper Kabul Now, there are several reasons possible: 'construction of Kamal Khan dam, poor leadership of security institutions, Taliban's defeat in Helmand, and some other specific factors' such as strategic and transit routes passing the province which Taliban wants to control.³¹³⁸

There were numerous reports on clashes mainly along the highway in Khashrod and Delaram districts in the reporting period. The Taliban often attacked military and police checkpoints in the

³¹³⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nimroz province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³¹³⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nimroz province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 4 events (1 battle and 3 remote violence) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

³¹³⁷ Kabul Now, What factors lay behind recent violence in Nimruz? 31 October 2020, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Taliban shows it can launch attacks anywhere across Afghanistan, even as peace talks continue, 25 October 2020, [url](#)

³¹³⁸ Kabul Now, What factors lay behind recent violence in Nimruz? 31 October 2020 w: [url](#)

province during 2020³¹³⁹ and tried to storm the district centre of Khashrod in January 2021.³¹⁴⁰ In the reporting period, some checkpoints along the highway in Khashrod and Delaram districts were abandoned by security forces.³¹⁴¹

The Taliban still planted IEDs along main routes crossing the province. On 4 January 2020 two civilians died in a mine explosion allegedly planted by the Taliban in Khashrod District. The victims were travelling from Shahrak district (Ghor province) to Khashrod district when the vehicle triggered the mine to detonate on contact.³¹⁴² On 5 August 2020, at least 6 civilians were killed by a IED planted on a road in Khashrod district.³¹⁴³ In December 2020 Taliban reportedly blew up parts of the Herat-Kandahar highway in Dularam district, making it difficult to transport goods and medicines.³¹⁴⁴

In January 2021 deadly ANA airstrike took place in Munazari village in Khashrod district which caused 18 civilian victims: eight children, seven women and three men. According to the army sources, the airstrike was conducted against a Taliban customs centre situated on a highway.³¹⁴⁵

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 2 514 persons displaced to Nimroz province from Farah (1905 persons) and Helmand (609 persons). All of them were displaced to Zaranj City.³¹⁴⁶

Clashes in the provinces of Farah, Helmand, Badghis, Kunduz and also in Nimroz in 2020 caused the increased influx of IDPs to Zaranj city. In October 2020, out of 300 families, about 60 were found eligible for humanitarian aid. They were living in the outskirts of Zaranj with access to social services and medical care but they could not afford medication in case of illness.³¹⁴⁷

Zaranj is also an important destination and transit city for returnees from Iran who cross the border in Milak. In 2020, a record number of 859 092 Afghans returned from Iran through two border-crossings: Milak in Nimroz and Islam Qala near Herat. IOM provides post-arrival humanitarian assistance to returnees.³¹⁴⁸

³¹³⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nimroz province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁴⁰ Pajhwok News Agency, 3 Taliban killed, 3 security men wounded in Nimroz clash, 21 January 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁴¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nimroz province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁴² SATP, Nimroz Timeline, 2020, May 2021 [url](#)

³¹⁴³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Humanitarian Update (3 – 9 August 2020), [url](#)

³¹⁴⁴ Salaam Times, Taliban glorify destruction of vital roads in Nimroz and Ghor provinces, 5 January 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁴⁵ Tolonews, Nimroz Airstrike Kills 18 Civilians: Local Council Head, 10 January 2021, [url](#)

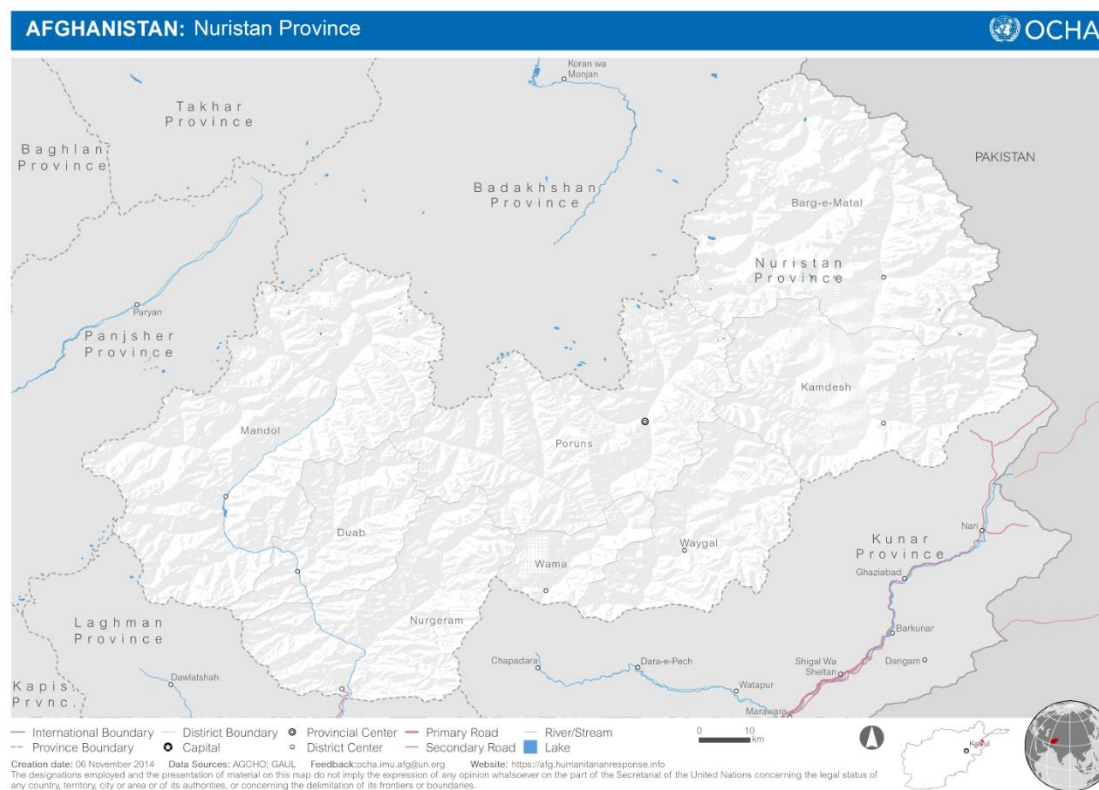
³¹⁴⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁴⁷ DACAAR, Conflict IDPs assessment in Zaranj of Nimroz by DACAAR 7 November 2020, [url](#), p. 1

³¹⁴⁸ IOM, Afghanistan, Return of Documented Afghans, 20-31 December 2020, n.d., [url](#)

2.25 Nuristan

2.25.1 General description of the province



Map 25: Afghanistan – Nuristan province, source: UNOCHA³¹⁴⁹

Nuristan is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghan-Pakistani border³¹⁵⁰ and is divided into the following districts: Barg-e-Matal, Duab, Kamdesh, Mandol, Nurgeram, Parun, Wama and Waygal. The provincial capital of Nuristan is Parun.³¹⁵¹ According to local residents interviewed by the magazine *The Diplomat*, Waygal district's actual name is Want.³¹⁵²

According to estimates for 2019-2020 NSIA, the province has a population of 160 993.³¹⁵³

Nuristan is composed mainly of Nuristani, with smaller Pashai, Pashtun³¹⁵⁴, Gujar and Tajik communities.³¹⁵⁵ Although the Nuristani people are mostly considered as a single ethnic group, they *de facto* comprise numerous ethnic and sub-ethnic communities that speak different Indo-European languages, sometimes subsumed under the Dardic languages branch.³¹⁵⁶ An international NGO

³¹⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nuristan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³¹⁵⁰ US Naval Postgraduate School, Nuristan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

³¹⁵¹ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Nuristan, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 25; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nuristan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Nuristan, n. d., [url](#); Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

³¹⁵² *Diplomat* (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: 'This War Will Never End Here', 13 June 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁵³ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 21

³¹⁵⁴ US Naval Postgraduate School, Nuristan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

³¹⁵⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Nuristan, n.d., [url](#)

³¹⁵⁶ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

interviewed by Sweden's Lifos stated that it was difficult for outsiders – both militants and civilians – to settle in Nuristan.³¹⁵⁷

Most of the province's roads are only served by pack animals and, despite construction work in several districts during the early 2000s, the roads remain in poor conditions.³¹⁵⁸ Some of them are completely inaccessible in winter due to floods or snowfalls.³¹⁵⁹ Even so, Nuristan is a key supply route from Pakistan for mujahideen groups. Moreover, it connects Kabul and the Panjsher valley in the central region through the provinces of Kapisa and Laghman.³¹⁶⁰ The rehabilitation of 15 kilometres of the Parun-Kunar road started in May 2019³¹⁶¹ and, according to a former executive of the National Security Council, was still underway in November 2019.³¹⁶² In June 2019, the local authorities began to expand a paved road from Parun to the remote districts of Kamdesh and Barg-e Matal.³¹⁶³

There is no functioning airstrip in Nuristan.³¹⁶⁴ According to articles published in August 2020, despite dusty roads and the lack of facilities, the number of tourists was in rise after the government announced Nuristan province as a national park.³¹⁶⁵ The construction of a 108 kilometers road, of which 61 kilometers has remained unpaved, was underway to connect Asalabad city in Kunar province to Parun city in Nuristan province, and planned to be completed in three years.³¹⁶⁶

2.25.2 Conflict background and actors in Nuristan

In June 2020, AAN's expert Obaid Ali stated that ISKP was 'likely present' in parts of Nuristan province.³¹⁶⁷

As of May 2020, Nuristan was listed by the UN Security Council as one of the twelve provinces where Al Qaeda was 'covertly active'. The report mentioned that Al Qaeda intended to form a joint unit of 2 000 fighters with the Haqqani Network, headed by Shir Khan Manga in the operational zone composed of Kunar and Nuristan.³¹⁶⁸ UNAMA added that Al Qaeda's main tasks consist in 'training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring', while 'being engaged in internal Taliban discussions over the movement's relationships with other jihadists entities'.³¹⁶⁹

In a May 2020 report, the UN Security Council listed Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jaish-e Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LeT) as Pakistani armed groups centred in eastern Afghan provinces, such as Nuristan, 'where they operate under the umbrella of the Afghan Taliban'.³¹⁷⁰

³¹⁵⁷ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (version 2.0), 07/04/2020, [url](#), p. 42

³¹⁵⁸ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

³¹⁵⁹ LCA, Afghanistan Road Network, 4 July 2018, [url](#)

³¹⁶⁰ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#); Foschini, F., New Battles and Old Wants in Nuristan, AAN, 2 June 2012, [url](#)

³¹⁶¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Rehabilitation work on Nuristan-Kunar road kicks off, 20 May 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁶² Ghorzang, T. [Twitter], posted on: 25 November 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁶³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Road connecting 2 districts with Paroon being built, 24 June 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020 (December 2019), 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 11

³¹⁶⁵ Tolonews, Tourists flock to Nuristan, 18 August 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁶⁶ Salaam, Times, 'Beautiful and green' Nuristan sees spike in tourism amid improved security, 5 August 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁶⁷ RFE/RL/Gandhara, The Taliban, The Government, And Islamic State: Who Controls What In Afghanistan?, 1 June 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁶⁸ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 12-13

³¹⁶⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 85-86

³¹⁷⁰ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 79

In an effort to merge parts of the ALP with the ANP and ANDSF, the Nuristan Environmental Protection Agency planned to recruit former ALP elements as environmental police officers.³¹⁷¹

According to LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted in April 2021, the districts of Nuristan are assessed as “contested” or “undetermined”. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Mandol district shifted to ‘Taliban control’.³¹⁷²

A survey of Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021 designated 38.13 % of Nuristan’s territory under government control, 59.38 % under Taliban control and 2.50 % controlled by neither side. According to the same survey, 62 454 of Nuristan’s inhabitants lived in areas under government control, 97 265 of the province’s population lived in areas under Taliban control and 4 095 of Nuristan’s residents lived in areas controlled by neither side.³¹⁷³

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, Nuristan province remained a poppy-free province.³¹⁷⁴

In terms of presence of government security forces, Nuristan province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.³¹⁷⁵

2.25.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 3 civilian casualties (1 killed and 2 injured) in Nuristan during ground engagements. This represents a decrease of 86 % compared to 2019.³¹⁷⁶ According to SIGAR, Resolute Support (RS) recorded less than 25 civilian casualties in Nuristan province during the first,³¹⁷⁷ and the second quarter of 2020.³¹⁷⁸ No RS information on civilian casualties per province was available for the second half of 2020 in SIGAR quarterly reports.³¹⁷⁹

From 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data on 28 violent events in Nuristan province from open sources: 24 coded as “battles”, 3 as “explosions/remote violence” and 1 as “violence against civilians”.³¹⁸⁰

³¹⁷¹ Salaam Times, Disbanded Local Police to get priority in job market after years of fighting, 22 October 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁷² LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). However, the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

³¹⁷³ Pajhwok Afghan news, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁷⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³¹⁷⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

³¹⁷⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

³¹⁷⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

³¹⁷⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

³¹⁷⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁸⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nuristan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

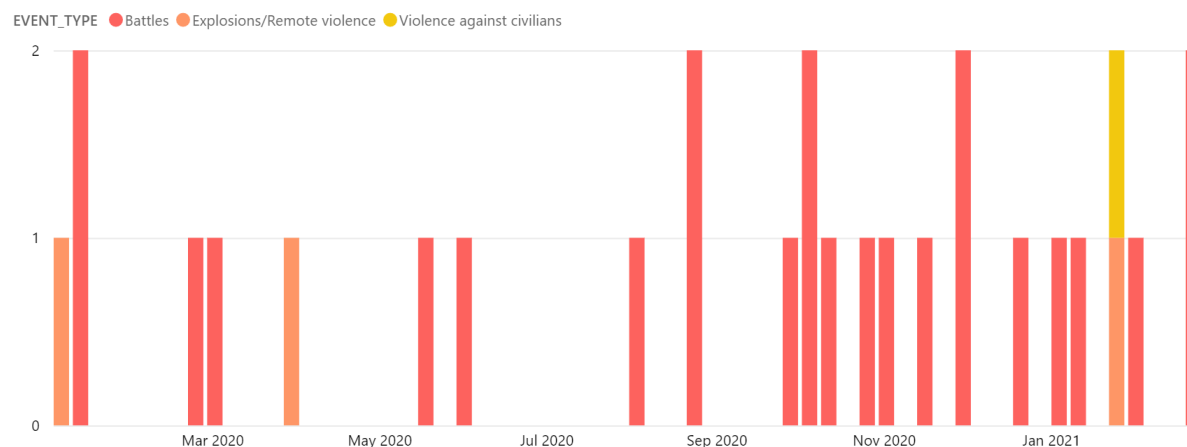


Figure 50: Nuristan province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³¹⁸¹

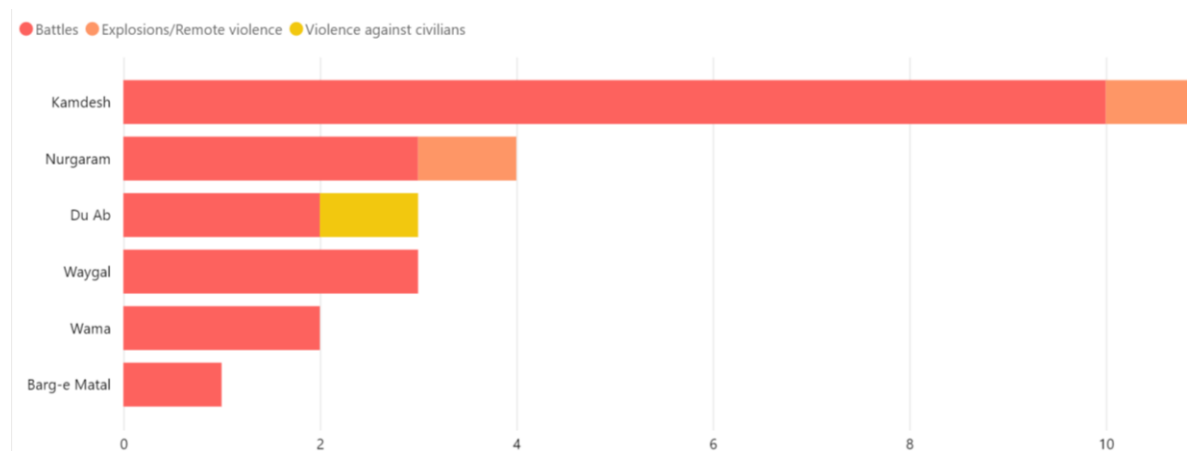


Figure 51: Nuristan province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³¹⁸²

The category ‘battles’ concerned mainly armed clashes between ANSF and Taliban. There was one attack on civilians led by an UAG around 29 January 2021 in Du Ab district in the category coded ‘violence against civilians’ and one activist was killed by unknown gunmen.³¹⁸³

Afghan journalist Bilal Sarwary noted that, soon after the signature of the US-Taliban agreement in Doha (February 2020), the Taliban had resumed their attacks on Afghan security forces, notably in Nuristan’s Barg-e Matal district.³¹⁸⁴ Afghan security officials also reported increasing Taliban military activity between March and May 2020 in eastern Afghanistan, particularly in Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan.³¹⁸⁵ UNOCHA confirmed that fighting continued in Nuristan and other eastern provinces in early May 2020, although it did not specifically mention the Taliban.³¹⁸⁶

³¹⁸¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nuristan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁸² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nuristan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 4 incidents (3 battles and 1 remote violence) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

³¹⁸³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Nuristan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁸⁴ Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 2 March 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁸⁵ Tolonews, ANDSF Repels Scores of Taliban Attacks in Past 24 Hours: MoD, 4 May 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Al Qaeda, Jaish-e-Mohammad Align With Taliban in East: Officials, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 May – 10 May 2020), 13 May 2020, [url](#)

A Taliban attack on Waygal's district centre in April 2020 was repulsed³¹⁸⁷. Tolonews reported on Twitter that 'hundreds' of Taliban fighters had been involved in this attack.³¹⁸⁸ Also in April 2020, the National Security Council spokesman, quoted by Pajhwok, claimed that the Taliban had killed 30 civilians across several provinces, including Nuristan, in the previous days.³¹⁸⁹

The Taliban were present in Nuristan province from where they succeeded in entering in Panjsher province on 8 September 2020 for the first time in the past 19 years. The local residents resisted and forced a dozen of Taliban to surrender to the police. Twenty villagers were taken hostage by the insurgents but were released later.³¹⁹⁰

On 23 February 2021, Taliban attacked a security outpost in Nuristan's Nurgaram district and killed one policeman. Four more were wounded. The elders warned that the Taliban will take over the centre of the district if the local authorities neglect the security issue.³¹⁹¹

According to Government data quoted by Tolonews, 80 civilians were killed and 95 wounded between 3 and 9 August 2020 after the *Eid* ceasefire. Most of the incidents happened in 26 provinces including Nuristan. The Taliban were suspected of involvement but did not claim the responsibility of the attacks.³¹⁹²

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 162 persons displaced from Nuristan, of which 123 were displaced within the province. During the same period, 25 persons were displaced to Kunar province and 14 to Panjsher province.³¹⁹³

According to IDPs interviewed in September 2019 by RFE/RL's Gandhara, frequent fighting between the government forces and insurgents, but also clashes between the Taliban and ISKP, had forced them to flee. Others stated that, as government supporters, they had no other option but to leave.³¹⁹⁴

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 1 696 persons displaced to Nuristan province. Outside of the aforementioned 292 people displaced within the province, 1 404 IDPs came from neighbouring Kunar and primarily settled in Parun and Wama districts.³¹⁹⁵ Most of them fled Kunar's Chapadara district in March and April 2019, where the Taliban and ISKP were then reportedly clashing.³¹⁹⁶

³¹⁸⁷ Afghanistan Times (The) [Twitter], posted on : 8 April 2020, [url](#); Tolonews [Twitter], posted on: 8 April 2020, [url](#);

Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on : 8 April 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁸⁸ Tolonews [Twitter], posted on: 8 April 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁸⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill 30 civilians in a week : NSC, 12 April 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁹⁰ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Hits Northeast Afghan Province For First Time In Two Decades, 8 September 2020, [url](#);

Afghanistan Times, Taliban attack Panjsher valley, hold villagers hostage, 8 September 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁹¹ Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Afghan Forces Outpost in Nuristan, 24 February 2021, [url](#); Khaama Press, 42 Taliban killed in Kandahar: MoD, 24 February 2021, [url](#)

³¹⁹² Tolonews, 80 Civilians Killed in Last Seven Days: Govt Data, 10 August 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 4 April 2021, [url](#)

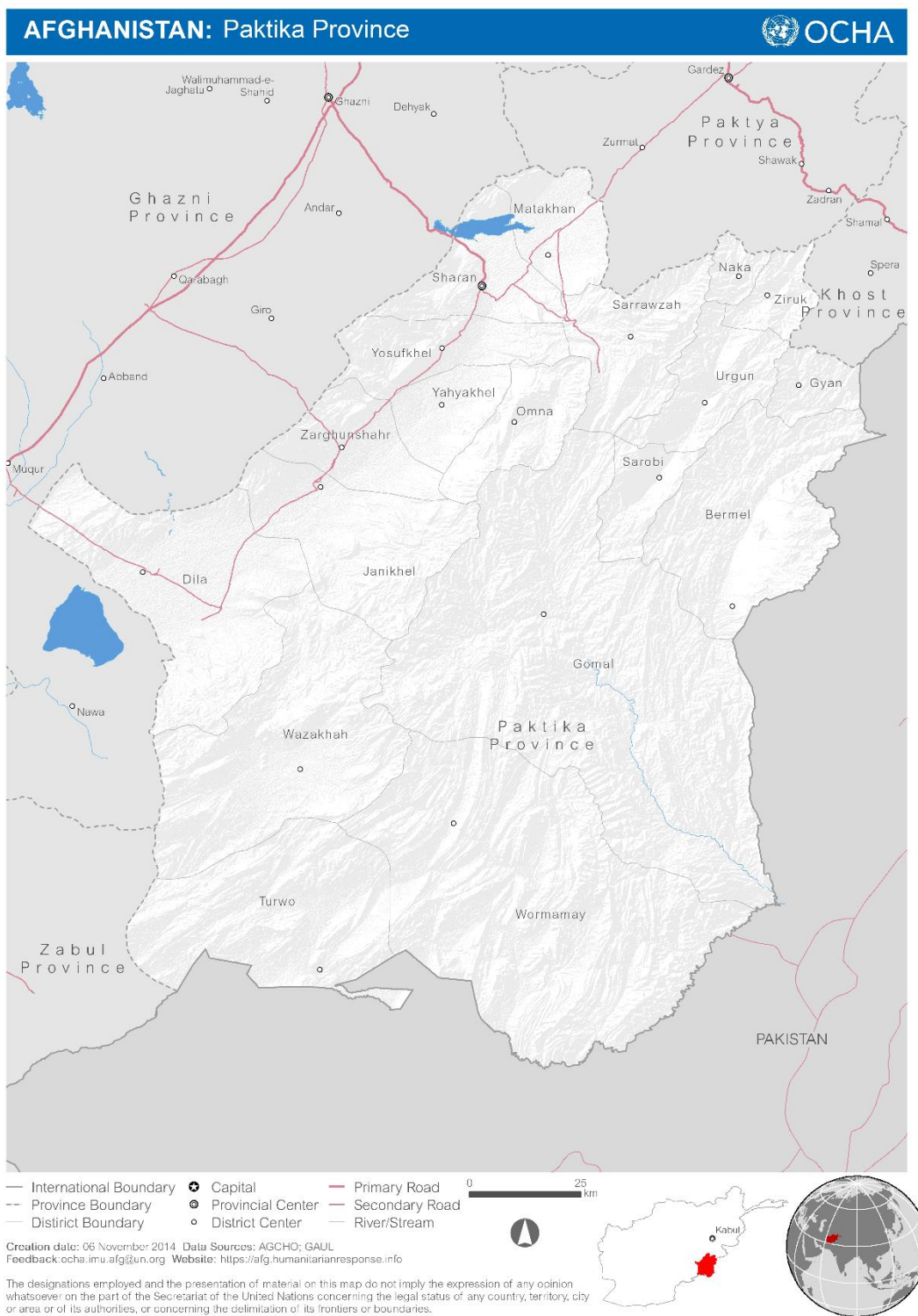
³¹⁹⁴ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Insecurity Prompts Thousands To Flee Homes In Eastern Afghan Province, 13 September 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, updated 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 12 July 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Conflict – Update (as of 3 April 2019), 4 April 2019, [url](#)

2.26 Paktika

2.26.1 General description of the province



Map 26: Afghanistan – Paktika province, source: UNOCHA³¹⁹⁷

³¹⁹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Provincial Reference Map – Paktika Province, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 25

A part of Loya Paktya (i.e. 'Greater Paktya'), an area also encompassing the provinces of Paktya and Khost³¹⁹⁸, Paktika is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghan-Pakistan border. The province is divided into the following districts: Bermel, Dila (also Khushamand), Gomal, Gyan, Janikhel, Matakhan, Naka, Omna, Sarobi, Sarrawzah, Sharan, Turwo, Urgun, Wazakhah, Wormamay, Yahyakhel, Yosufkhel, Zarghunshahr (also Khairkot) and Ziruk.³¹⁹⁹ The province also has the following four non-official districts: Shakeen, Bak Khil, Charbaran and Shakhil Abad.³²⁰⁰ The provincial capital of Paktika is Sharana.³²⁰¹

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by the NSIA, the province has a population of 762 108. The rural population accounts for more than 99 % of the total.³²⁰²

The province is mainly composed of Pashtuns, with a Tajik minority in the cities of Sharana and Urgun.³²⁰³ In an August 2020 report focused on the newly established ANA-TF, AAN's Kate Clark pointed out the homogeneity of Paktika's Pashtun tribal structure, the western half of the province being inhabited by the Suleimankhel.³²⁰⁴ Gandhara also noted that, in 2014, military operations in North Waziristan caused 7 000 Pakistani families to seek shelter in Khost and Paktika, primarily in Urgun and Bermel districts.³²⁰⁵

The National Highway 11 ('NH11') connects Ghazni province to Paktika's Sharan and continues to Paktya's Zurmat.³²⁰⁶

In July 2020, Pakistan opened the Angur Ada border point, in Bermel district, to Afghan goods. Until then, it was an unofficial motorable crossing point.³²⁰⁷ However, in September 2020, the bad condition of the road serving it was hampering trade with Pakistan.³²⁰⁸ Besides, since the full reopening of Khost's Ghulam Khan border point, in August 2019, the residents of Paktya, Paktika and Khost are allowed to enter Pakistan with their *tazkira*, under the condition that they have relatives living on the other side of the Durand Line.³²⁰⁹

A 2016 map by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) lists three 'small airports' in Paktika: two in or close to Sharana and one in Urgun district. A heliport is also located in the southern part of the province.³²¹⁰ A November 2020 report of the Afghan Civil Aviation Authority mentions an aerodrome,

³¹⁹⁸ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), *Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field*, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 1

³¹⁹⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, *Estimated population of Afghanistan 2019-2020*, November 2019, [url](#), p. 17 ; UNOCHA, *Afghanistan: Paktika Province – District Atlas*, April 2014, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, *Background Profile of Paktika*, n.d., [url](#); Muzhary, F., *The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling*, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

³²⁰⁰ Afghanistan, Office of the President, *Provincial Profile Paktika*, n. d., [url](#)

³²⁰¹ UNOCHA, *Afghanistan: Paktika Province – District Atlas*, April 2014, [url](#)

³²⁰² Afghanistan, NSIA, *Estimated population of Afghanistan 2019-2020*, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 17

³²⁰³ Muzhary, F., *The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling*, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

³²⁰⁴ Clark, K. et al., *Afghanistan's Newest Local Defence Force: Were "all the mistakes of the ALP" turned into ANA-TF safeguards?*, AAN, August 2020, [url](#), p. 20

³²⁰⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, *In Afghanistan, Lockdown Hits Waziristan Refugees Hard*, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

³²⁰⁶ Italy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Evaluation Report - Afghanistan: Rehabilitation of Maidan Shar – Bamyan Road*, 2014, [url](#), p. 8; Pajhwok Afghan News, *6 months on, Ghazni-Paktika highway remains closed*, 13 December 2018, [url](#)

³²⁰⁷ Sabawoon, A. M., *The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border*, AAN, 28 January 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, *Pakistan Opens Two Crossings to Afghan Goods*, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

³²⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, *Calls to turn Angoor Adda road into transit route*, 14 September 2020, [url](#)

³²⁰⁹ Sabawoon, A. M., *The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border*, AAN, 28 January 2020, [url](#)

³²¹⁰ MSF, *Afghanistan: Country Kit*, 12 January 2016, [url](#), p. 3

‘OASA-Sharana’, 4 km southeast from the provincial capital.³²¹¹ While, as of August 2020, there were no scheduled flights to and from Paktika³²¹², Kam Air’s website lists Sharana as a ‘future route’.³²¹³

2.26.2 Conflict background and actors in Paktika

In a 2009 article published by the Lowy Institute, researcher Tom Gregg, a former head of UNAMA’s Southeast region, pointed out that the Pashtun tribes of Loya Paktya historically resisted central state intervention and traded their loyalty against a ‘special administrative status’. Although they have been eroding, tribal structures in Loya Paktya remained more ‘coherent’ than in other parts of the country. This is reflected, for instance, in a better preservation of *Pashtunwali* than in other Pashtun areas and a ‘unique tribal mechanism of policing (*arbaki*) for defence from external aggression and natural resource protection’.³²¹⁴ RFE/RL/Gandhara highlighted that Loya Paktya residents were still relying more on traditional conflicts resolution assemblies, rather than on the government justice system.³²¹⁵ In some parts of Paktika, such as Yahyakhel district³²¹⁶, these solid intra-tribal relations ‘hampered the emergence of *mujahideen* factions and strongmen and the sort of severe intra-factional conflicts that arose in other districts in Paktika and elsewhere in the 1980s and 1990s’.³²¹⁷

However, according to an AAN analysis from December 2018, the Taliban were controlling or contesting some districts of Paktika at the time.³²¹⁸ In 2019, the group was reported to have ‘strong ties’ with organised criminal groups involved in heroin and hashish trafficking or local businesses extortion.³²¹⁹ In April 2020, a Taliban spokesman published pictures of a training camp, named Tariq bin Ziyad Camp, in Paktika.³²²⁰ Besides, in November 2020, during an operation against a Taliban hideout in Bermel district, Afghan security forces seized a Taliban surveillance drone, which they reported to be also used ‘to launch small bombs’.³²²¹

In May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mullah Nasar, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the Taliban shadow governor in Paktya, while Mawlawi Qasam Farid was listed as the head of the military commission in Loya Paktya.³²²² The former was reportedly replaced by Mohammad Essa Akhund in early 2021.³²²³ In October 2020, Afghan security forces killed Mullah

³²¹¹ Afghanistan, ACAA, Aeronautical Information Publication – Aerodrome (AD), Part 3, 5 November 2020, [url](#), p. 483

³²¹² Afghanistan, Civil Aviation Authority, [informal translation, Paktika Governor, Paktika People’s Representative in the National Assembly and some elders of the province met with the General Director of the Civil Aviation Authority], 16 August 2020, [url](#)

³²¹³ Kam Air, Route Map – Domestic Routes, n. d., [url](#)

³²¹⁴ Gregg, T., Caught in the Crossfire: The Pashtun Tribes of Southeast Afghanistan, Lowy Institute, October 2009, [url](#), p. 4

³²¹⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, In Afghanistan’s Pashtun Heartland, Tribal Rule Supersedes State Law, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

³²¹⁶ Clark, K. and Muzhary, F., How to Set up a ‘Good ALP’: The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, [url](#); Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

³²¹⁷ Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN and GPPI, July 2020, [url](#), p. 51

³²¹⁸ Clark, K. and Muzhary, F., How to Set up a ‘Good ALP’: The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, [url](#)

³²¹⁹ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, S/2019/481, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 12

³²²⁰ LWJ, Taliban touts more elite ‘Red Unit’ fighter training on social media, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

³²²¹ Afghanistan Times, Afghan troops capture a Taliban weaponized drone in south, 9 November 2020, [url](#); Kabul Now, NDS operatives seize Taliban’s surveillance drone in Paktika, 9 November 2020, [url](#)

³²²² UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 25, 27

³²²³ Tolonews, Taliban Reshuffles Key Posts as New Fighting Season Nears, 6 March 2021, [url](#)

Abdul Qarim, thought to be a senior member of the Quetta Shura, during an ambush in Janikhel district.³²²⁴

The Taliban have also been able to send fighters from Pakistan's Waziristan to several provinces, including Paktika, from their 'transit hub' in Zabul.³²²⁵

In April 2020, LWJ described Paktika as 'a bastion of the Haqqani Network'.³²²⁶ The group started to expand in Loya Paktya some years before 2011³²²⁷, mainly in the Zadran valley between Paktya, Paktika and Khost, which served as a corridor from Pakistan to Ghazni and Logar.³²²⁸ As of June 2019, 1 800 – 2 000 fighters of the Network were reportedly leading the Taliban operations in Loya Paktya, with the help of Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants.³²²⁹ The Haqqani Network was then reported to be holding all the main shadow government positions (provincial governors and district governors) in the region.³²³⁰ As of May 2020, the Haqqani Network was allegedly working with Al Qaeda on a joint unit of 2 000 fighters, headed by Hafiz Azizuddin Haqqani in Loya Paktya.³²³¹ In December 2020 and January 2021, NDS arrested eleven alleged members of the Haqqani Network in Sharana. They were accused of being involved in landmine explosions and of planning targeting killings and attacks in both Paktya and Paktika provinces.³²³²

In 2019, Al Qaeda was reportedly trying to strengthen its positions in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, for instance in Paktika's Bermel district. The movement was reported to be closely cooperating with Lashkar-e Tayyiba and the Haqqani Network, while providing training and religious instruction to Taliban fighters and their families.³²³³ However, in a February 2021 report, the UN Security Council did not list Paktika among the Afghan provinces where Al Qaeda was operating at the time – although it did mention neighbouring provinces of Paktya, Zabul, Khost and Ghazni.³²³⁴ In March 2021, ANDSF killed a commander of Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) in Gyan district, along with a Taliban commander. Pajhwok added that they were crossing the province to provide weapons and military training to militants in Ghazni, Logar and Zabul provinces.³²³⁵

³²²⁴ Afghanistan Times, Senior Taliban commander killed in south, 15 October 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Top Member of 'Taliban's Quetta Shura' Killed in NDSF Ambush, 15 October 2020, [url](#)

³²²⁵ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 21-22

³²²⁶ LWJ, Taliban touts more elite 'Red Unit' fighter training on social media, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

³²²⁷ Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

³²²⁸ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 9. See also, UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktika Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³²²⁹ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, S/2019/481, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 17

³²³⁰ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, S/2019/481, 13 June 2019, [url](#), pp. 17-18

³²³¹ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 13

³²³² Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Haqqani Network members detained in Paktika, 31 December 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Haqqani network members arrested in Paktika, 11 January 2021, [url](#); Etilaatroz, «آی اس آی» و چهار عضو مسئول ارتباطی [Five members of the Haqqani network were arrested in Paktika], 11 January 2021, [url](#)

³²³³ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, S/2019/481, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 9

³²³⁴ UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#)

³²³⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Al-Qaeda member, Taliban commander killed in Paktika raid: NDS, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

In a June 2019 report, the UN Security Council listed other foreign groups active in Loya Paktya, where they benefitted from the 'remote terrain' and the limited capacity of the security forces to reach these areas – notably the TTP³²³⁶, which, as of April 2021, still enjoyed a 'significant presence' in Paktika, according to the Diplomat magazine.³²³⁷ The province also appears to shelter a few logistics and religious leaders of the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, although it is mainly located in the north-eastern regions.³²³⁸

Pakistani forces were reported to make forays into Paktika, notably in Bermel district, where they conducted shelling in August 2020.³²³⁹

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, Paktika province remained a poppy-free province.³²⁴⁰

In terms of presence of government security forces, as of December 2020, Paktika province was under the responsibility of the 203th ANA Corps.³²⁴¹ At that time, it was not assisted anymore by the Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces, that was still active in June 2020.³²⁴²

In July 2020, it was also announced that at least one of the five US bases closed in accordance with the Doha agreement was located in Paktika.³²⁴³

According to a 2021 UNAMA and OHCHR joint report, in regard with the ANP, Paktika was the fourth worst place of the country in terms of torture and ill-treatment in detention. An ANP commander was sentenced to 21 years in prison for 'murder committed with torture' over a detainee in Matakhan district in March 2020.³²⁴⁴

As for the ALP, it has been commended for expelling the Taliban from Yahyakhel district and maintaining stability there since 2012. Although there has been reports of 'abusive commanders and forced recruitments' in some places of Paktika, the robust tribal structure of Loya Paktya and its tradition of local defence groups (*arbaki*) have contributed to 'more instances of effective, less abusive forces'.³²⁴⁵ The ALP was officially disbanded on 30 September 2020 and replaced by a new local force, the ANA Territorial Force (ANA-TF). It prompted concerns over a pattern of defections of local officials towards the Taliban.³²⁴⁶ According to a government tracking sheet provided to AAN, as of December 2019, the ANA-TF was deployed in Gomal, Sarobi, Sharan, Urgun, Yahyakhel, Yosufkhel and Zarghunshahr (Khairkot) districts of Paktika. In several of them, local elites were consulted

³²³⁶ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, S/2019/481, 13 June 2019, [url](#), pp. 17-18

³²³⁷ Diplomat (The), Spike in Violence Follows Failed Negotiations Between the Pakistani Taliban and Islamabad, 3 April 2021, [url](#)

³²³⁸ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 20-21

³²³⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Barmal residents demand befitting response to Pakistan artillery shelling, 21 August 2020, [url](#) ; Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 11 and 12 August 2020, [url](#) ; [url](#)

³²⁴⁰ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³²⁴¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 5

³²⁴² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 14 ; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 5

³²⁴³ Tolonews, Five Bases Closed in Afghanistan: US Official, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

³²⁴⁴ UNAMA and OHCHR, Preventing Torture and Upholding the Rights of Detainees in Afghanistan: A Factor for Peace, February 2021, [url](#), p. 15, 37

³²⁴⁵ Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN and GPPI, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 44, 46-47, 52-53

³²⁴⁶ Clark, K., Disbanding the ALP: A dangerous final chapter for a force with a chequered history, AAN, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

during the recruitment process of ANA-TF fighters, to ensure that the force was 'tribally inclusive' and, thus, more efficient.³²⁴⁷

According to Human Rights Watch, the Khost Protection Force (KPF) possesses a battalion in Paktika's Sharan district.³²⁴⁸ Another pro-government armed group, also operating outside of official security forces chains of command, emerged in 2019, and is locally referred to as 'Shaheen Forces' or as '904 Unit'. It is headquartered at Shaheen Camp in Urgun district.³²⁴⁹ While UNAMA explained in its 2020 report that the Shaheen Forces were thought to operate in 'close coordination' with the NDS special forces³²⁵⁰, it only stated in 2021 that they 'may have a relationship' with one another, adding it was not able to obtain more information about their command structure from the Afghan authorities.³²⁵¹ UNAMA noted that the decrease in civilian casualties across the country in 2020 (- 42%) was driven by 'fewer civilian casualties attributed to the Khost Protection Force and the Paktika-based 'Shaheen Forces''. However, UNAMA expressed concern over the proportion of targeted killings and 'civilian harm due to threat and intimidation' perpetrated by these groups.³²⁵² Despite occasional investigations ordered by the government, the impunity that they enjoy contributes to 'anti-Government sentiment and spark protests among the civilian population'.³²⁵³

A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021³²⁵⁴ estimated that the Taliban and the government each controlled half of Paktika's population and territory.³²⁵⁵

According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, Bermel, Janikhel, Matakhan, Turwo, Urgun, Wormamay, Yahyakhel, Yosufkhel and Ziruk districts are 'contested', while Dila, Gomal, Gyan, Naka, Omna and Wazakhah districts are under Taliban control. Finally, Sarobi, Sarrawzah, Sharan and Zarghunshahr districts are listed as government-controlled or undetermined. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Sarrawzah district shifted to 'contested'.³²⁵⁶

Pajhwok further observed that Naka and Gyan district centres were under Taliban control³²⁵⁷, in line with the public admission of it by the Afghan government in July 2019.³²⁵⁸ While LWJ claimed that Dila district had been overrun in July 2019³²⁵⁹, the UN Secretary-General stated that the takeover had only been temporary.³²⁶⁰ As for Wazakhah district, Pajhwok reported in March 2020 that for several years, due to the Taliban's blockage of the main road, it had been forced to airlift essential supplies.³²⁶¹ Afghan media Etilaatroz noted that before the visit of the newly appointed provincial

³²⁴⁷ Clark, K. et al., Afghanistan's Newest Local Defence Force: Were "all the mistakes of the ALP" turned into ANA-TF safeguards?, AAN, August 2020, [url](#), pp. 21-22, 29, 35, 37-38, 41

³²⁴⁸ HRW, "They've Shot Many Like This" Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

³²⁴⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 53, 56, 58, 65, 74, 84

³²⁵⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 53, 56, 58, 65, 74, 84

³²⁵¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 102

³²⁵² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 19, 65, 158

³²⁵³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 53, 56, 58, 65, 74, 84

³²⁵⁴ For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country.

³²⁵⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³²⁵⁶ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., [url](#) However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

³²⁵⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³²⁵⁸ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., [url](#) However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

³²⁵⁹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

³²⁶⁰ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 6

³²⁶¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Police officer accused of torture, extortion, 19 March 2020, [url](#)

police chief in February 2021, no Afghan official had come to Wormanay and Turwo districts in the last three years, apparently 'due to insecurity on the main roads and some in the surrounding areas'.³²⁶²

2.26.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 119 civilian casualties (39 deaths and 80 injured) in Paktika province. This represents a decrease of 29 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were non-suicide IEDs, ground engagements and targeted killings.³²⁶³ Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Paktika in the first half of 2020, reporting an increase during the second quarter compared to the first.³²⁶⁴ Such data for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.³²⁶⁵

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data on 131 violent events in Paktika province from open sources: 90 coded as 'battles' (69 %), 29 as 'explosions/remote violence' (22 %) and 12 as 'violence against civilians' (9 %).³²⁶⁶

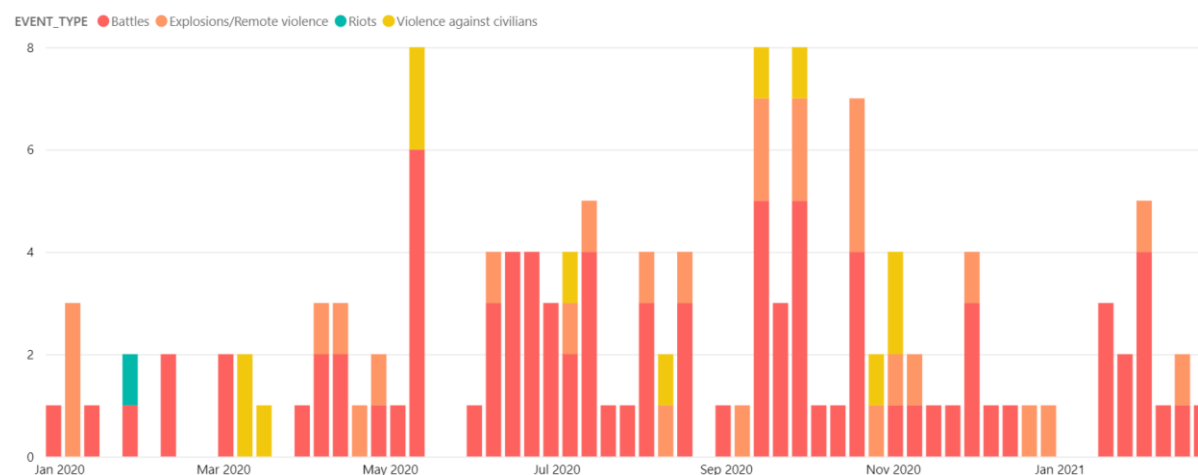


Figure 52: Paktika province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³²⁶⁷

³²⁶² Etilaatroz, د پکتیکا امنیه قوماندان په لومړي ځل هغو ولسوالیو ته ولاړ، چې تر اوسه هېڅ چارواکي نه و ورغلی، 21 February 2021, [url](#) [informal translation: For the first time, the Paktika police chief visited districts where no official had yet arrived], 21 February 2021, [url](#)

³²⁶³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

³²⁶⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69 ; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

³²⁶⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

³²⁶⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktika province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³²⁶⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktika province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

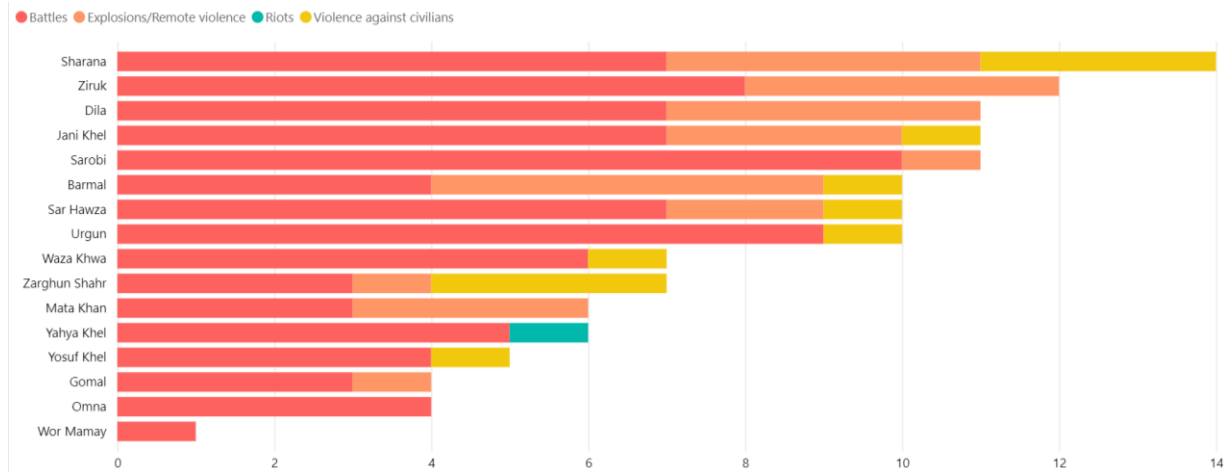


Figure 53: Paktika province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³²⁶⁸

All of the events coded as 'battles' by ACLED were 'armed clashes'. Of the 90 armed clashes that ACLED collected information about, 69 were considered to have been initiated by the Taliban, who only targeted ANDSF.³²⁶⁹ For instance, Taliban attacks were reported in Ziruk district in June 2020³²⁷⁰ and in Urgun district in December 2020, when they killed a local police commander.³²⁷¹ In September 2020, a local politician interviewed by the Washington Post indicated that the Taliban were 'increasing pressure on district centres' and carrying out more killings and attacks on government outposts.³²⁷² In particular, on 23 September, the Taliban launched an attack on a military base in Wazakhwa district. According to local officials, AGEs suffered 100 casualties, including 65 deaths.³²⁷³ As for the 18 armed clashes initiated by the Afghan security forces and allied militias against the Taliban, they mostly occurred in Janikhel, Sarobi, Urgun and Yusufkhel districts.³²⁷⁴

Paktika was one of the 16 provinces where, throughout 2020, UNAMA noted an increase in civilian casualties due to ground engagements. For instance, in October 2020, a boy was killed by the Shaheen Forces during a clash with the Taliban in Urgun district.³²⁷⁵ The Taliban's own news website, Voice of Jihad, also mentioned the killing of another civilian by Afghan forces in Khairkot (Zarghunshar) district, in November 2020.³²⁷⁶

In its February 2021 assessment based on several criteria, including conflict severity and spread, UNOCHA listed three Paktika districts among the 100 'hardest to reach' in the country: Matakhan (n°78), Dila (n°95), and Gomal (n°97) districts.³²⁷⁷ None of Paktika districts were listed in the previous assessment, published in August 2020.³²⁷⁸

³²⁶⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktika province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 3 events (2 battles and 1 remote violence) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

³²⁶⁹ ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktika province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³²⁷⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 26 Taliban killed in Ghazni, Paktika violence, 14 June 2020, [url](#)

³²⁷¹ Hasht-e Subh, [مؤسس پولیس محلی در ولایت پکتیکا در جنگ با طالبان کشته شد](#) [informal translation: The founder of the local police in Paktika province was killed in a battle with the Taliban], 5 December 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 31 December 2020, [url](#)

³²⁷² Washington Post (The), Deadly airstrike in Afghanistan kills at least 10 civilians, 30 Taliban fighters despite ongoing peace talks, 20 September 2020, [url](#)

³²⁷³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Forces Reportedly Kill 65 Taliban Fighters In Fierce Battle, 25 September 2020, [url](#)

³²⁷⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktika province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³²⁷⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 65, 72

³²⁷⁶ Voice of Jihad, War Crimes (November 2020), 10 December 2020, [url](#)

³²⁷⁷ UNOCHA, Hard-To-Reach Districts, February 2021, [url](#)

³²⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Hard To Reach Districts, August 2020, [url](#)

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’ between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021, the two most represented sub-categories were ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’ (59 %) and ‘Shelling/artillery/missile attack’ (24 %). Omna, Urgun, Wazakhwa, Wormamay, Yahyakhel and Yosufkhel districts were not affected by this type of violence.³²⁷⁹

Out of 17 ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’ incidents recorded by ACLED, 14 were attributed to the Taliban, and 3 to unidentified armed groups. Most of them took place between June and October 2020, Bermel (3), Matakhan (3) and Sharan (3) being the most affected districts. Five of these events caused civilian fatalities.³²⁸⁰ On 28 June 2020, an unclaimed roadside bomb killed a 13-year-old boy and wounded another civilian in a village of Makhahan.³²⁸¹ In September 2020, a civilian was killed and about 20 others, including women and children, were injured when a wedding convoy hit a roadside bomb in Janikhel district. The attack remained unclaimed.³²⁸² In October 2020, another roadside bomb allegedly set up by the Taliban killed four children in Sharana.³²⁸³

According to ACLED, there were 7 instances of shelling reported: 3 by the Taliban, 3 by ANDSF and 1 by the Pakistani military. The remaining one was carried out by the Pakistani forces³²⁸⁴ which, in August 2020, killed several civilians in Bermel district.³²⁸⁵ In addition, the Taliban reported the death of five civilians in two separate shellings conducted by the international forces, first in Yosufkhel district in June 2020, then in Khushamand (Dila) district in November 2020.³²⁸⁶

During the reporting period, according to ACLED, the Taliban perpetrated two grenade attacks across the province.³²⁸⁷ One of them took place in Zarghunshar (Khairkot) district, on 3 May 2020, when a hand grenade thrown into a mosque wounded 20 worshippers.³²⁸⁸

Finally, three air/drone strikes were recorded by ACLED during the reporting period, in Ziruk and Dila districts.³²⁸⁹

Attacks on civilians were reported in half of Paktika’s districts, only two recording more than one event (Sharan and Zarghunshahr, three each). Out of these 12 incidents, 6 have been attributed to Afghan forces and its allied militias, three to the Taliban and three to unidentified armed groups.³²⁹⁰ Among the five events which caused fatalities, the deadliest one took place in Sharana, in July 2020, when, under ‘unclear’ circumstances, unidentified gunmen killed six members of a family, including a young girl but also one to three police officers, which aroused suspicion about the Taliban’s

³²⁷⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktika province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³²⁸⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktika province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³²⁸¹ Afghanistan Times, Roadside bomb kills teenager in Paktika, 8 June 2020, [url](#)

³²⁸² Pajhwok Afghan News, Bride among 20 wounded in Paktika blast, 20 September 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 – 20 September 2020, 23 September 2020, [url](#)

³²⁸³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³²⁸⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktika province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³²⁸⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Barmal residents demand befitting response to Pakistan artillery shelling, 21 August 2020, [url](#)

³²⁸⁶ Voice of Jihad, War Crimes (June 2020, 5 July 2020, [url](#) ; Voice of Jihad, War Crimes (November 2020, 10 December 2020, [url](#)

³²⁸⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktika province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³²⁸⁸ Reuters, Taliban Truck Bombing Kills At Least Five At Afghan Military Center, 4 May 2020, [url](#)

³²⁸⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktika province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³²⁹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktika province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

involvement.³²⁹¹ Taliban acts of violence against civilians also included the killing of three civilians (including a child) in Zarghunshar district, in May 2020.³²⁹²

Regarding violent behaviour of ANDSF and its allies towards civilians, the police chief of Wazakhah district has been accused of killing and beating people, extorting money from shopkeepers and drug smuggling.³²⁹³ His counterpart in Warmamai district has been reported to commit land grabbing.³²⁹⁴ According to the Taliban's news website, Voice of Jihad, in November 2020, a pro-government militia violently looted shops in Yahyakhel district.³²⁹⁵

According to the UN Secretary-General, during the second quarter of 2020, the Taliban kidnapped and mistreated three human rights defenders in Paktika.³²⁹⁶

Besides, during the third quarter of 2020, several health facilities were temporarily closed in Paktika due to ongoing clashes, one of them being permanently moved from Khoshamand to Yahyakhel district.³²⁹⁷

In September 2020, UNOCHA reported on ongoing clashes between ANDSF and AGEs along the main road connecting Ghazni to Paktika, affecting civilian movements.³²⁹⁸ According to AAN, since 2017, the Taliban have prevented local population to use the asphalted portion of this highway, likely in Ghazni's Andar district, in order to isolate two military bases located along the road.³²⁹⁹ As of November 2020, they were still in control of the road.³³⁰⁰ The highway crossing Wazakhah district has too reportedly been blocked by the Taliban for several years in Goshta area.³³⁰¹ Lastly, in June 2020, a government official stated that over an unspecified period, the Taliban had destroyed 51 small and big bridges across the country, many of them in Paktya, Paktika and Kandahar provinces.³³⁰²

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 2 387 persons displaced from Paktika.³³⁰³ Except for 175 residents from Urgun and Gyan districts who were headed to Khost province, 93 % sought refuge within the province.³³⁰⁴ Out of these 2 387 persons, 1 806 were displaced within Bermel district (76 %), in August 2020³³⁰⁵, where Pakistani shelling was reported at the time.³³⁰⁶ IDPs from Dila (105), Naka (77) and Sarobi (28) districts moved to the

³²⁹¹ Afghanistan Times, Gunmen kill six members of a family in Paktika, 8 July 2020, [url](#) ; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 of a family massacred in Paktika, 8 July 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 30 July 2020, [url](#)

³²⁹² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

³²⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Police officer accused of torture, extortion, 19 March 2020, [url](#)

³²⁹⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktika border police commander accused of atrocities, 7 February 2021, [url](#)

³²⁹⁵ Voice of Jihad, Shops looted in Paktika, 27 November 2020, [url](#)

³²⁹⁶ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General, S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³²⁹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: HAG Quarterly Report (July to September 2020), 26 October 2020, [url](#), p. 7

³²⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 – 27 September 2020), 30 September 2020, [url](#)

³²⁹⁹ Afghan, S., Living with the Taleban (1): Local experiences in Andar district, Ghazni province, AAN, 19 October 2020, [url](#)

³³⁰⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban destroy parts of Ghazni-Paktika highway, 8 November 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban Destroys 600 Meters of Ghazni Highway, 9 November 2020, [url](#)

³³⁰¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Police officer accused of torture, extortion, 19 March 2020, [url](#)

³³⁰² Afghanistan Times, Peace process risks collapse if Taliban continue hostility, 14 June 2020, [url](#)

³³⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, last update: 5 April 2021, [url](#)

³³⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, last update: 5 April 2021, [url](#)

³³⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, last update: 5 April 2021, [url](#)

³³⁰⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Bermel residents demand befitting response to Pakistan artillery shelling, 21 August 2020, [url](#); Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 11 and 12 August 2020, [url](#)

provincial capital district, Sharan. No displacement has been recorded in Paktika since August 2020.³³⁰⁷

Over the reporting period, Paktika's displacement figures were among the lowest recorded in Afghanistan.³³⁰⁸ Nevertheless, IOM reported that from January to June 2020, it was one of five provinces that showed 'a sharp increase in the number of IDPs, most likely due to people fleeing to safer areas to escape the ongoing armed conflict'.³³⁰⁹

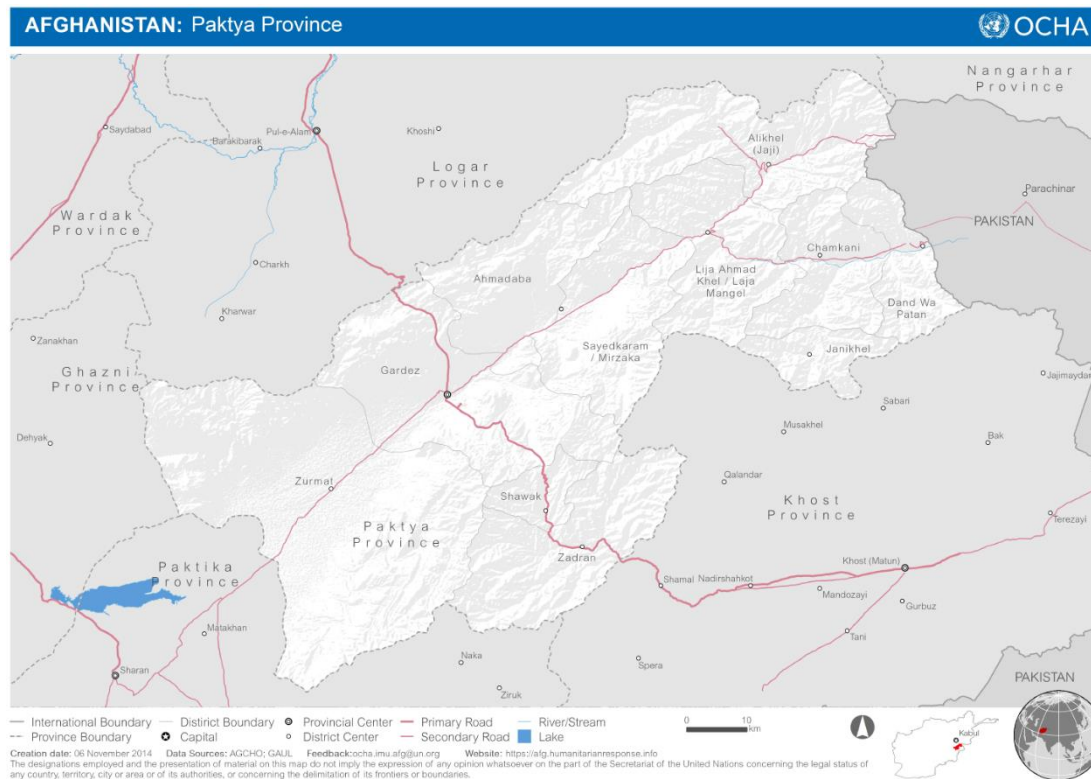
³³⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, last update: 5 April 2021, [url](#)

³³⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, last update: 5 April 2021, [url](#)

³³⁰⁹ IOM, DTM Afghanistan, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results Round 10 Jan-June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 5

2.27 Paktya

2.27.1 General description of the province



Map 27: Afghanistan – Paktya province, source: UNOCHA³³¹⁰

A part of Loya Paktya (i.e. ‘Greater Paktya’), an area also encompassing the provinces of Khost and Paktika³³¹¹, Paktya is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.³³¹² The province is divided into the following districts: Ahmadaba, Alikhel (or Jaji), Chamkani, Dand Wa Patan, Garda Siray, Gardez, Janikhel, Lija Ahmad Khel, Laja Mangel, Mirzaka, Rohany Baba, Sayedkaram, Shawak, Zadrán and Zurmat.³³¹³ As of June 2020, the NISA described Garda Siray, Laja Mangel, Mirzaka and Rohany Baba as ‘temporary’ districts³³¹⁴, meaning that they have been created by previous regimes or, more recently, under Presidents Karzaï and Ghani, and that their status has not been approved by the Afghan parliament yet.³³¹⁵ AAN specified that Rohany Baba had been created out of Zurmat district.³³¹⁶ However, in its 2014 provincial atlas, UNOCHA respectively

³³¹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Provincial Reference Map – Paktika Province, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 26

³³¹¹ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 1

³³¹² US Naval Postgraduate School, Paktya Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

³³¹³ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Paktya, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 22

³³¹⁴ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 22

³³¹⁵ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

³³¹⁶ Khan P. and Ruttig, T., The 2018 Election Observed (1) in Zurmat, Paktia: Real voting only in the district centre, AAN, 29 October 2018, [url](#)

presented Sayedkaram/Mirzaka and Lija Ahmad Khel/Laja Mangel as different names referring to the same district.³³¹⁷ The provincial capital of Paktya is Gardez.³³¹⁸

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 601 230. The rural population accounts for more than 95 % of the total.³³¹⁹

The main ethnic groups in the province are Pashtuns, followed by Tajiks.³³²⁰ In 2018, AAN noted that a small Shia community of mostly bilingual (Dari as a first language and Pashtu as a second) residents lived in Khwajah Hassan, in the north-east of the provincial capital. They belong to a group called Sadat (singular Sayyed), who are reported to have been living in the area without conflict with the local Sunni (Tajik and Pashtun) communities of the province since the Soviet invasion.³³²¹ According to the BBC, there used to be a Sikh and Hindu minority in Paktya, but most of them have fled the province, with allegedly only one Sikh family left in the last years.³³²²

The Kabul-Gardez Highway connects the provincial capital to Kabul City crossing through Logar³³²³ over the Tera Pass.³³²⁴ Another highway, called the G-K or Gardez-Khost Highway, passes through the districts of Shawak and Zadran as well as through Khost province, and reaches the road leading to Ghulam Khan at the Afghan-Pakistani border.³³²⁵ Since the full reopening of the Ghulam Khan border point, in August 2019, the residents of Paktya, Paktika and Khost are allowed to get into Pakistan with their *tazkira*, under the condition that they have relatives living on the other side of the Durand Line.³³²⁶ In July 2020, Pakistan opened the Dand Wa Patan border point to Afghan goods.³³²⁷

In October 2020, the Taliban reportedly allowed the construction of a 10 kilometre-long portion of the Gardez-Zurmat road.³³²⁸ In the past, they have allegedly been hostile towards the project³³²⁹, which encountered multiple delays due to insecurity in the past decade.³³³⁰ In August 2020, flash floods damaged some roads in Paktya.³³³¹

In a 2016 map, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) listed one 'small airport' in Paktya, in Gardez³³³², also mentioned in an airport list posted in September 2017 on the Afghan Civil Aviation Authority

³³¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³³¹⁸ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Paktya, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, November 2019, [url](#), p. 18

³³¹⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 18

³³²⁰ US Naval Postgraduate School, Paktya Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Paktia, n. d., [url](#)

³³²¹ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia's Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

³³²² BBC News, [بنيها بازمانده اقلیت سیک در پکتیا](#) [informal translation: 'The only survivor of the Sikh minority in Paktia: I don't want to leave my city'], 6 October 2019, [url](#); New York Times (The), India Offers Escape to Afghan Hindus and Sikhs Facing Attacks, 19 July 2020, [url](#)

³³²³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Insecurity growing on Kabul-Gardez highway', 18 July 2018, [url](#); Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia's Shias, 18 August 2018, AAN, [url](#)

³³²⁴ Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A. M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: A security overview of Logar province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

³³²⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Reconstructed Gardez-Khost highway inaugurated, 15 December 2015, [url](#); US USAID, Gardez-Khost National Highway (NH08) Overview, 7 May 2019, [url](#)

³³²⁶ Sabawoon, A. M., The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, [url](#)

³³²⁷ Tolonews, Pakistan Opens Two Crossings to Afghan Goods, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

³³²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 10-km road being built in Taliban-controlled area, 17 October 2020, [url](#)

³³²⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 months on, Paktians await work on Gardez-Zurmat road, 25 August 2019, [url](#); Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

³³³⁰ Tolonews, Construction Work Resumes on Gardez-Zurmat Road, 21 August 2020, [url](#)

³³³¹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Flash Floods Kill At Least 100 In Afghanistan, 26 August 2020, [url](#)

³³³² MSF, Afghanistan: Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#), p. 3

website.³³³³ However, it does not appear as a destination of the two main Afghan carriers, Kam Air and Ariana Afghan Airlines.³³³⁴

2.27.2 Conflict background and actors in Paktya

Paktya, a conservative province, played a significant role during the Soviet invasion in the 1980s, the civil war and Taliban rule in the 1990s, as well as during the post-2001 years.³³³⁵ The province is home to many ex-mujahideen commanders who were members of the Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami-e Afghanistan (The Islamic Revolutionary Movement of Afghanistan), a traditionalist Sunni *tanzim*, or *mujahideen*-party, with a local and rural social base. Many of its fighters joined the Taliban in the mid-1990s.³³³⁶

Although Paktya province has been witnessing an active insurgency since the mid-2000s³³³⁷, a 2011 academic article quoted by AAN stated that historically, the majority of local tribes tried to avoid supporting one of the warring parties but kept contacts with all of them: '[...] the tribal system in Paktya obstructs or at least constrains the emergence of warlordism as well as the influence of the State.'³³³⁸ The fact that the hostility of 'even a minor community' would be counterproductive for the AGEs 'discourages acts that would antagonise whole communities'.³³³⁹ As of 2021, Loya Paktya's residents were still relying more on traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as tribal councils, rather than on the government justice system.³³⁴⁰

In the first stage after 2001, the people from Loya Paktya overthrew the Taliban through tribal councils and supported the Afghan government. However, this mindset changed after the tribal elders of the region were excluded from the state-building process.³³⁴¹

Described by analyst Fabrizio Foschini as 'the most problematic' district in Loya Paktya, due to its relatively big size, tribal complexity and fierce fights between the US troops and the Taliban and Al Qaeda, in 2002, Zurmat provided AGEs with more opportunities to gain a foothold. Over the 2002-2012 next decade, the civilian population bore the brunt of military operations, terrorist attacks and night raids.³³⁴²

According to AAN's researchers, although the region was not their heartland, by 2018³³⁴³, the Taliban had been able to make of Paktya one of their strongholds.³³⁴⁴ In Zurmat district, a strategic 'transit

³³³³ Afghanistan, ACAA, All Airports, 24 September 2017, [url](#)

³³³⁴ Ariana Afghan Airlines, Destinations, n. d., [url](#); Kam Air, Route Map – Domestic Routes, n. d., [url](#)

³³³⁵ Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#); Ruttig, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, [url](#); Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

³³³⁶ Ruttig, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, [url](#) See also: Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

³³³⁷ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), pp. 16-17; Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia's Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

³³³⁸ Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

³³³⁹ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia's Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

³³⁴⁰ RFE/RL/Gandhara, In Afghanistan's Pashtun Heartland, Tribal Rule Supersedes State Law, 15 February 2021, [url](#)

³³⁴¹ Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

³³⁴² Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url](#); Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

³³⁴³ Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

³³⁴⁴ Taz, Nicht nur die Taliban als Problem [informal translation: Not only the Taliban as a problem], 21 October 2018, [url](#)

corridor' for fighters from Pakistan to Ghazni³³⁴⁵, the Taliban first had to coexist with a local family, the Mansurs, who joined them and obtained high-ranking positions within the Taliban apparatus in the 1990s. The Mansurs were nonetheless powerful enough to retain some autonomy, until their influence gradually vanished at the end of the 2000s.³³⁴⁶ AAN's Fabrizio Foschini stated that the Kulalgo area, in Zurmat district, had been a Taliban hub for a long time and was, as of 2015, under their complete control.³³⁴⁷

As of May 2020, the Taliban shadow governor in Paktya was Abdul Rahman Bilal, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network. He was appointed after the 'reshuffle' of the Taliban government structure ahead of the 2020 fighting season.³³⁴⁸ However, he was reportedly replaced by Mawlawi Hamza in early 2021.³³⁴⁹

In Zurmat district, Pakistani and Central Asian fighters have been reported to fight within Taliban ranks.³³⁵⁰ According to security officials interviewed by RFE/RL in June 2020, some of the local Taliban freed by the authorities in the frame of the USA/Taliban agreement had resumed fighting soon after.³³⁵¹ In late 2020, media reported on the use of small camera drones, turned into weaponised devices by the Taliban against ANDSF outposts in several districts of Paktya, namely Mirzaka, Sayedkaram and Zurmat.³³⁵²

Moreover, Paktya is one of the provinces where the UN Security Council observed 'strong ties' between the Taliban and organised criminal groups involved in heroin and hashish trafficking or local business extortion.³³⁵³ The Taliban have also been reported to collect taxes from truck drivers going from Paktya to Ghazni³³⁵⁴, development projects, telecommunication networks and customs checkpoints (notably in Mirzaka district).³³⁵⁵

The Haqqani Network started to expand in Loya Paktya some years before 2011.³³⁵⁶ In 2019, AAN described it as 'powerful' in Paktya.³³⁵⁷ As of June 2019, 1 800 – 2 000 fighters of the Network were reportedly leading the Taliban operations in Loya Paktya, supported by Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants. The network was also reported to hold all the main Taliban shadow government

³³⁴⁵ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), *Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field*, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 34

³³⁴⁶ Ali, O., Bleuer, C., and Sadat, S. A., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

³³⁴⁷ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url](#)

³³⁴⁸ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9, 25, 27

³³⁴⁹ Tolonews, Taliban Reshuffles Key Posts as New Fighting Season Nears, 6 March 2021, [url](#)

³³⁵⁰ Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

³³⁵¹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, For Now, Fewer Former Afghan Prisoners Returning To The Battlefield, 23 June 2020, [url](#)

³³⁵² Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktia: Taliban drop bombs from drone cameras, 5 November 2020, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Fire From the Sky: The Afghan Taliban's Drones, 22 December 2020, [url](#)

³³⁵³ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, S/2019/481, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 12

³³⁵⁴ Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

³³⁵⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban extort millions from uplift projects in Paktia, 20 January 2021, [url](#)

³³⁵⁶ Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

³³⁵⁷ Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

positions (provincial governors and district governors) in Loya Paktya.³³⁵⁸ As of May 2020, the Haqqani Network was rumoured to plan a joint unit of 2 000 fighters with Al Qaeda.³³⁵⁹

In June 2019, the UN Security Council noted that many foreign terrorist fighters were active in Loya Paktya, where they benefitted from the 'remote terrain' and the limited capacity of the security forces to reach these areas.³³⁶⁰ Among these foreign AGEs were the TTP, with 3 500 fighters across Kunar, Paktya and Paktika provinces³³⁶¹, and Al Qaeda, with forces estimated between 200 and 500 in 11 provinces, including Paktya.³³⁶² According to UNAMA, Al Qaeda's main tasks consist of 'training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring'.³³⁶³ In July 2020, a military and intelligence affairs analyst added that the group operated in rural areas of Paktya, where its members lived in 'old bases of the Hezb-e-Islami and Etihad-e-Islami parties in Spina Shaga and in the outskirts of Jaji District'.³³⁶⁴

In October 2020, the Washington Post stated that 'several local armed groups that are not formally aligned with the Taliban or any other large militant organization' were active in Paktya.³³⁶⁵ As for ISKP, in June 2019, the UN Security Council deemed its attempts to expand in Paktya as 'unsuccessful'.³³⁶⁶

Additionally, among the numerous tribal conflicts recorded across the province, the dispute between two major Pashtun tribes, the Mangal and the Kharoti, stands out. For 30 years, both sides have been fighting over the ownership of mountainous land in Dand Wa Patan district. As of January 2021, the conflict had reportedly caused dozens of fatalities over the past decades, including seven in June 2020. Attempts at mediation, whether conducted by the local authorities or the Taliban, have failed. RFE/RL/Gandhara reported on the hiring of locals to fight on behalf of residents living abroad or elsewhere in the country.³³⁶⁷

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, Paktya province remained a poppy-free province.³³⁶⁸

In terms of presence of government security forces, as of December 2020, Paktika province was under the responsibility of the 203th ANA Corps.³³⁶⁹ At that time, it was not assisted anymore by the Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces, that was still active in June 2020.³³⁷⁰ In line with the US/Taliban Doha agreement, US forces withdrew from the base that they occupied within

³³⁵⁸ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, S/2019/481, 13 June 2019, [url](#), pp. 17-18

³³⁵⁹ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 13

³³⁶⁰ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, S/2019/481, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 17

³³⁶¹ UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, S/2019/481, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 18

³³⁶² UN Security Council, Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/68, 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 15

³³⁶³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 85-86

³³⁶⁴ Salaam Times, 'Unbreakable' links between Taliban, al-Qaeda pose quandary for peace, 16 July 2020, [url](#)

³³⁶⁵ Washington Post (The), With U.S. troops gone, Taliban expands influence in one Afghan province, 10 October 2020, [url](#)

³³⁶⁶ UN Security Council UN, Twenty-fourth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2019/570, 15 July 2019, [url](#), p. 15

³³⁶⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 die in clash over land dispute in Paktia, 30 June 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Guns For Hire: Tribal Mercenaries Turn A Profit In The Afghan Borderlands, 15 January 2021, [url](#)

³³⁶⁸ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³³⁶⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 5

³³⁷⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 14; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, [url](#), p. 5

an Afghan compound, southeast of Gardez City, in March 2020. From then on, deprived of substantial intelligence, air support and presence on the ground, the Afghan forces conducted less patrols and military operations. The Washington Post added that, due to understaffing, police and army units were moved closer to the centre of Gardez City, depleting the checkpoints in the periphery or leaving them to 'less well-trained' allied militiamen.³³⁷¹

In December 2020, the Paktya police chief, Akhtar Mohammad Shahin, resigned only two months after his appointment, allegedly due to the corruption and the lack of professionalism of the provincial police.³³⁷² As for the ALP, Paktya has often been listed as one of the provinces where it had proven very effective compared to other forces, due to its tradition of local defence groups (*arbaki*).³³⁷³ However, in Zurmat district, following abuses against civilians, the ALP unit was disbanded in 2018.³³⁷⁴ On 30 September 2020, the ALP was replaced by a new local force, the ANA Territorial Force (ANA-TF). This prompted concern over former ALP members potentially joining the AGEs.³³⁷⁵ AAN nonetheless noted that Paktya was one of the provinces where local communities were involved in the identification and vetting of potential ANA-TF recruits, to 'actively ensure there was local support for the programme'.³³⁷⁶

According to AAN and Human Rights Watch, writing in 2019, the 01-Unit of NDS Special Forces ('NDS-01') and the Khost Protection Force ('KPF') operate in Paktya. Backed by the CIA, both have been accused of killing civilians in several raids in Zurmat.³³⁷⁷ In another report, AAN added that the KPF and NDS-supported 'uprising forces'³³⁷⁸ hold posts along the Gardez-Tamir road.³³⁷⁹ Another pro-government armed group, the Paktika-based Shaheen Forces, also appeared to conduct operations in Paktya.³³⁸⁰

In October 2020, the Washington Post assessed that Paktya was 'not heavily contested by the Taliban', noting that since the departure of US forces from the province, in March 2020, they had not attempted to seize urban centres. Instead, they focused on strengthening their grip on territory that they have controlled for years, by setting up more permanent checkpoints and fortified bases. The US newspaper added that the Taliban were now able to intimidate people living in contested and government-held rural areas.³³⁸¹

A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021³³⁸² estimated that 55.87 % of Paktya's territory (341 877 inhabitants) was under government control, and 44.13 % (270 075 inhabitants) under Taliban control.³³⁸³

³³⁷¹ Washington Post (The), With U.S. troops gone, Taliban expands influence in one Afghan province, 10 October 2020, [url](#)

³³⁷² Khaama Press, Paktia Police Chief Resigns over Corruption, Negligence, 21 December 2020, [url](#)

³³⁷³ Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN and GPPI, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 46-47, 93 ; Clark, K., Disbanding the ALP: A dangerous final chapter for a force with a chequered history, AAN, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

³³⁷⁴ Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

³³⁷⁵ Clark, K., Disbanding the ALP: A dangerous final chapter for a force with a chequered history, AAN, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

³³⁷⁶ Clark, K. et al., Afghanistan's Newest Local Defence Force: Were 'all the mistakes of the ALP' turned into ANA-TF safeguards?, AAN, August 2020, [url](#), p. 34, 35

³³⁷⁷ Ruttig, T., "Murder Is Always": The Kulalgo night raid killings, AAN, 17 August 2019, [url](#); HRW, "They've Shot Many Like This" Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

³³⁷⁸ For more information, see: Chapter 1.2. Actors in the conflict

³³⁷⁹ Ali, O., Sadat, S. A., and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

³³⁸⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 58

³³⁸¹ Washington Post (The), With U.S. troops gone, Taliban expands influence in one Afghan province, 10 October 2020, [url](#)

³³⁸² For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country.

³³⁸³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, Ahmadaba, Alikhel (Jaji), Dand Wa Patan, Lija Ahmed Khel and Sayedkaram districts were 'contested'. LWJ also listed Chamkani, Gardez, Shawak and Zadrar districts as government-controlled or undetermined, and Janikhel and Zurmat districts as under Taliban control. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Janikhel and Zurmat districts remained under the 'Taliban control'.³³⁸⁴ Regarding Zurmat district, in its 2021 survey, Pajhwok listed it among the districts inaccessible to the authorities.³³⁸⁵

2.27.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 206 civilian casualties (62 deaths and 144 injured) in Paktya province. This represents a decrease of 6 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were non-suicide IEDs, followed by targeted killings and ground engagements.³³⁸⁶ Resolute Support recorded between 102 and 150 civilian casualties in Paktya in the first half of 2020, reporting an increase during the second quarter compared to the first.³³⁸⁷ Such data for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.³³⁸⁸

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data on 267 violent events in Paktya province from open sources: 185 coded as 'battles' (68 %), 62 as 'explosions/remote violence' (24 %), 20 as 'violence against civilians' (8 %) and one incident concerned an attempted escape by Taliban prisoners.³³⁸⁹

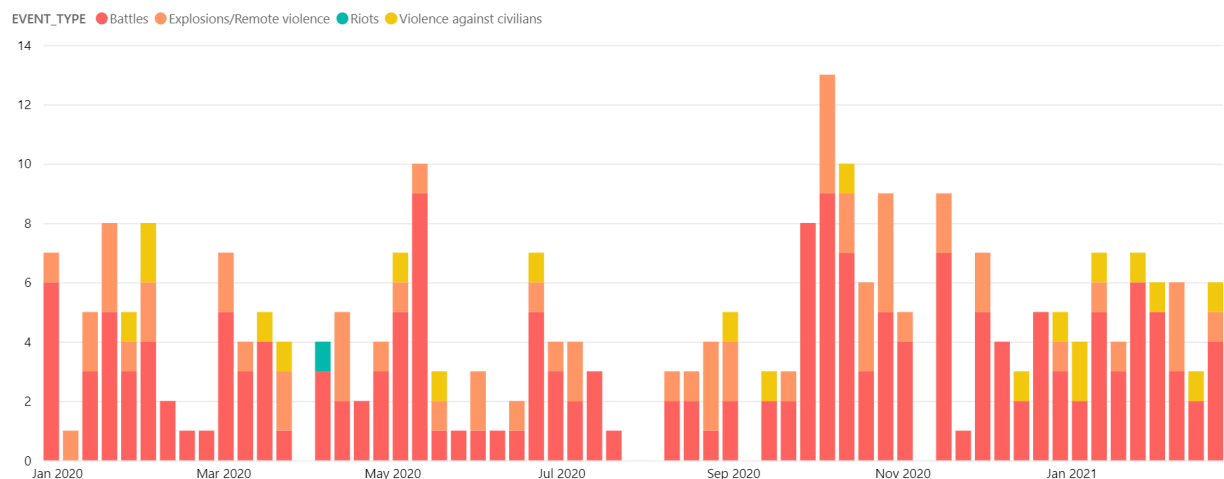


Figure 54 Paktya province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³³⁹⁰

³³⁸⁴ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., [url](#) However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

³³⁸⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³³⁸⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

³³⁸⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69 ; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

³³⁸⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

³³⁸⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktya province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³³⁹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktya province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

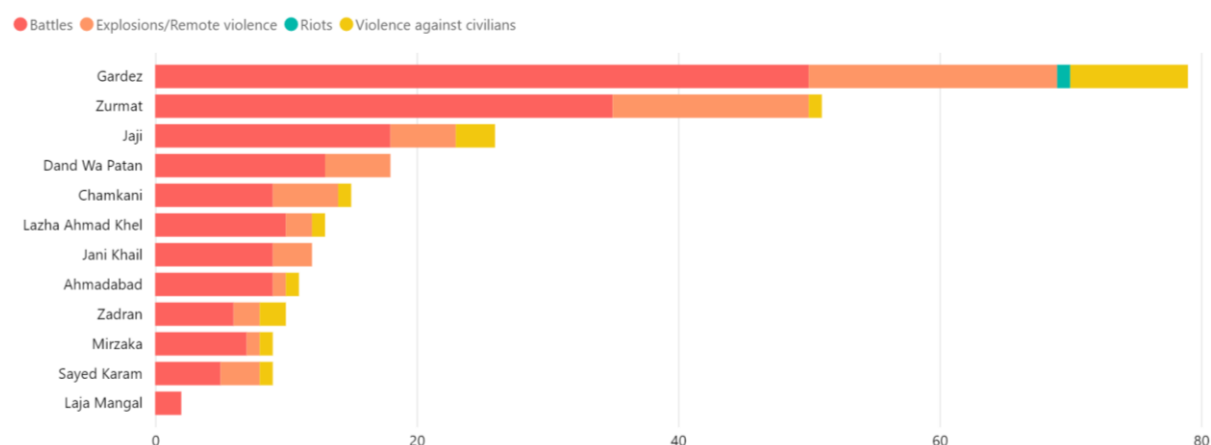


Figure 55: Paktya province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³³⁹¹

Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, all of them were ‘armed clashes’. More than 80 % of the armed clashes were described as initiated by the Taliban against the ANDSF and pro-government militias, with a peak in October 2020 and high levels in the following months.³³⁹² Examples of such incidents include, in Dand Wa Patan district, the killing of 14 border security agents during a Taliban attack on a checkpoint, on 29 May 2020, despite the extension of the *Eid* ceasefire. According to security officials quoted by Tolonews, the Taliban ‘suffered heavy casualties’ too.³³⁹³ The Afghan security forces and allied groups initiated about 20 clashes, mostly in Ahmadaba, Gardez, Jaji and Zurmat districts. Half of them occurred between May and July 2020.³³⁹⁴

In 2020, interviewed by AAN after the February ‘reduction in violence’ period had ended, a local journalist stated that the Taliban had soon resumed attacks against security forces posts in Jaji (Alikhel), Rohany Baba, Sayedkaram and Zurmat districts,³³⁹⁵ although violence had remained ‘somewhat reduced’ in some other districts.³³⁹⁶ A couple of months later, a militia commander active in Zurmat district described ‘the increase in Taliban activity’ as ‘shocking’. In October 2020, the Washington Post noted that, since the withdrawal of US forces from Paktya, the province had witnessed more ‘low-level attacks’, including targeted killings.³³⁹⁷

In its February 2021 assessment based on several criteria, including conflict severity and spread, UNOCHA listed two Paktya’s districts among the 100 ‘hardest to reach’ in the country: Zurmat (n°9) and Chamkani (n°94).³³⁹⁸ The latter was not mentioned in the previous assessment, published in August 2020, while Zurmat only ranked n°71.³³⁹⁹

³³⁹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktya province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 13 events (12 battles and 1 remote violence) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

³³⁹² ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktya province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³³⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 security personnel killed in Paktia attack, 29 May 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 14 Border Forces Killed in ‘Taliban Attack’ Despite Ceasefire, 30 May 2020, [url](#)

³³⁹⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktya province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³³⁹⁵ AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, [url](#)

³³⁹⁶ Clark, K., Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (2): Assessing the conflict a month after the US-Taliban agreement, AAN, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

³³⁹⁷ Washington Post (The), With U.S. troops gone, Taliban expands influence in one Afghan province, 10 October 2020, [url](#)

³³⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Hard-To-Reach Districts, February 2021, [url](#)

³³⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Hard To Reach Districts, August 2020, [url](#)

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as 'Explosions/Remote violence', the most represented sub-category was 'Remote explosive/Landmine/IED' (64,5 %), distantly followed by and 'Air/drone strikes' (16 %) and 'Shelling/artillery/missile attacks' (13 %). Provincial capital Gardez was clearly the most affected district by explosive/IED attacks (12 incidents out of 39 recorded province-wide). All of them were attributed to the Taliban and, for a lesser part, to unidentified armed groups.³⁴⁰⁰ For instance, in January 2020, a magnetic IED planted by an unidentified armed group killed one civilian and injured eight others in Gardez.³⁴⁰¹ A similar event killed two civilians in Gardez City in August 2020.³⁴⁰² In Zurmat, a Taliban roadside bomb killed a mother and two of her children in June 2020.³⁴⁰³ Another explosion of a Taliban-planted roadside device, in Jaji district, killed a child and wounded four others in January 2021.³⁴⁰⁴

The three suicide attacks recorded in Paktya also took place in Gardez³⁴⁰⁵, the first one occurring in March.³⁴⁰⁶ In May, the Taliban took responsibility for the explosion of a suicide truck near an ANA facility, in a populated area of the city, killing 5 people (including 3 civilians) and injuring at least 14.³⁴⁰⁷ In September 2020, a Taliban suicide bomber and gunmen attacked a military base, causing six fatalities.³⁴⁰⁸

Out of the 20 recorded events of violence against civilians, half took place in Gardez district. The ten incidents attributed to Afghan security forces and its NATO allies were all reported by the Taliban's website, Voice of Jihad.³⁴⁰⁹ Moreover, in January 2021, residents of Ahmadabad protested against the brutality of the police special forces, accused of arbitrarily killing two local civilians. The authorities denied this claim, explaining that they had been killed during an operation targeting narcotics factories.³⁴¹⁰ AGEs were held responsible for the rest of the ACLED-documented events involving violence against civilians.³⁴¹¹ In October 2020, the Taliban were held responsible for the killing of three civilians in Mirzaka district.³⁴¹²

There were reports of murders of tribal elders in Jaji (Alikhel) district, in June 2020³⁴¹³, and in Gardez City in October 2020.³⁴¹⁴ Several other government officials or local public figures have been under attack. For instance, in September 2020, the deputy head of the provincial council was killed in Gardez City. Despite remaining unclaimed, the attack was thought to have been carried out by the Taliban.³⁴¹⁵ In another event attributed to the Taliban, in September 2020, two religious scholars were abducted then killed in Chamkani district.³⁴¹⁶

³⁴⁰⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktya province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January - 2 February 2020), 2 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁰² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁰³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁰⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁰⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktya province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁰⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 injured in Gardez suicide bombing, 23 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 killed, 34 injured in Gardez truck bombing, 14 May 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Truck bomb in eastern Afghan city kills five, Taliban claim responsibility, 14 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁰⁸ Al Jazeera, Afghan soldiers killed in Taliban attack on Paktia military base, 1 September 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Attacks Military Base In Afghanistan, Killing Three, 1 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁰⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktya province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁴¹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktia protestors ask govt to explain murder of 2 locals, 6 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁴¹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Paktya province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁴¹² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁴¹³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁴¹⁴ Khaama Press, Tribal Chief Killed in a Magnetic Bomb Blast, 5 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁴¹⁵ RFE/RL, Paktia Provincial Councilor Shot Dead In Southeastern Afghanistan, 19 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁴¹⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#)

Besides its high numbers across the three ACLED categories detailed above, representing 34 % of the incidents recorded in the province, Gardez capital district has also been the scene of increasing crime, since at least 2019.³⁴¹⁷ In February 2021, a special police unit and new checkpoints were reportedly set up to improve the situation in the city, following a rise in robberies and carjacking.³⁴¹⁸ In October 2020, the Taliban destroyed a Salaam Network telecom tower in Gardez City, a few kilometres away from the NDS headquarters.³⁴¹⁹

According to Pajhwok, in early 2020, the Taliban were preventing Paktya's health centres from receiving medical supplies, reportedly because of their discontent towards the quality of services provided by the NGO in charge of these supplies.³⁴²⁰ In mid-February 2020, UNOCHA noted that 45 health care facilities had forcibly been closed by AGEs in Paktya, depriving up to one million people of basic health services.³⁴²¹ Lastly, the Taliban allowed polio vaccination again in Paktya during the third quarter, except for Zurmat district.³⁴²²

The UN Secretary-General noted that Paktya was among the provinces where several civil society activists and human rights defenders had been killed in unattributed attacks between June and December 2020.³⁴²³

In September 2020, the Taliban damaged a school in Jaji (Alikhel) district, wounding 15 children who were returning home from the madrasa.³⁴²⁴ The following month, they were held responsible for a bomb explosion near a school under construction, because the building firm had refused to pay them the 10 % fee that they demanded.³⁴²⁵ Also in October, the Washington Post reported on increasing Taliban threats against Paktya's schools and teachers, one of them stating that he had been ordered to quit working for the government. By then, the Taliban had forcibly closed 'a number of schools' across the province.³⁴²⁶

Regarding ethnic minorities, a member of the Sikh community was abducted in Chamkani district in June 2020 and released a month later, upon the intervention of local tribal elders.³⁴²⁷

In July 2020, the Kabul-Paktya highway was reported to be increasingly dangerous, several residents of Paktya complaining of frequent AGEs attacks on ANDSF.³⁴²⁸ Insecurity was also behind the constant pushbacks of rehabilitation work on the Gardez-Zurmat road.³⁴²⁹ That is the reason why, in November 2020, Afghan forces established new bases and checkpoints along the road.³⁴³⁰ In December 2020, ANDSF retook control of the Gardez-Dand Wa Patan road, which was blocked by the Taliban in Lija Ahmad Khel and Mirzaka districts since June 2020, forcing the travellers to significant detours.³⁴³¹ Rebuilding work was reportedly underway in March 2021.³⁴³²

³⁴¹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Rising targeted killings spark concerns in Gardez, 16 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁴¹⁸ Etlaatroz, د پکتیا امنیه قومانداني د پوليسو د کارنيزون ځانگړې قطعه جوړه شوه, [informal translation: 'A special police garrison unit has been formed at the Paktia police headquarters'], 8 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁴¹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban torch Salaam Network tower in Paktia, 13 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁴²⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Medical supplies to Paktia clinics yet to resume, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁴²¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (10 February – 16 February 2020), 19 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁴²² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: HAG Quarterly Report (July to September 2020), 25 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁴²³ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, 18 August 2020, [url](#), p. 9 ; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General, 9 December 2020, [url](#), p. 10

³⁴²⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 74

³⁴²⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 – 11 October 2020), 14 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban extort millions from uplift projects in Paktia, 20 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁴²⁶ Washington Post (The), With U.S. troops gone, Taliban expands influence in one Afghan province, 10 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁴²⁷ Kabul Now, 11 Afghan Sikhs seek citizenship in India, 26 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁴²⁸ Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁴²⁹ Tolonews, Construction Work Resumes on Gardez-Zurmat Road, 21 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁴³⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktika-Paktia highway security ensured after 10 years, 3 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁴³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktia-Paktika road reopens after 5 months, 14 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁴³² Pajhwok Afghan News, Gardez-Dand-i-Patan road being rebuilt in Paktia, 9 March 2021, [url](#)

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 2 637 persons displaced from Paktya – one of the lowest provincial figures recorded over the period. Almost all of them were displaced within the province, in Gardez capital district. Only 61 persons were headed to Nangarhar's Jalalabad. During the same period, 77 persons were displaced from Logar province to Paktya's Gardez district.³⁴³³

More than half of the displacements occurred in January and February 2020 (1 421), with other significant waves in June (539) and September (616) 2020. Overall, the main districts of origin of IDPs were Sayedkaram (623), Janikhel (588), Zurmat (586), Zadran (357) and Alikhel (Jaji) (343). The five of them accounted for almost 95 % of Paktya's IDPs.³⁴³⁴ This can be linked to protracted insecurity, since Taliban operations were reported in some of these districts throughout the reporting period.³⁴³⁵

In a weekly update from February 2021, UNOCHA mentioned 7 000 newly displaced people from Alikhel (Jaji), Sayedkaram, Zadran and Zurmat to Gardez City, due to clashes and IED attacks.³⁴³⁶

³⁴³³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, last update: 5 April 2021, [url](#)

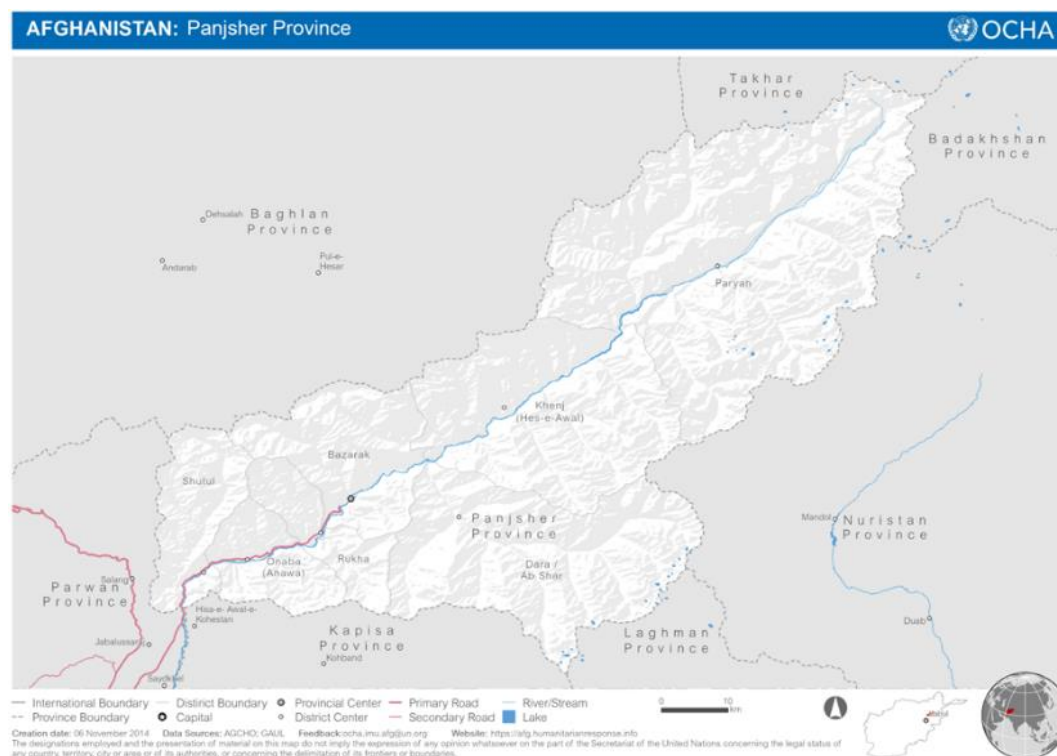
³⁴³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 30 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, last update: 5 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁴³⁵ VOA, Landmines Kill 12 Afghans in 2 Incidents, 3 June 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 militants killed in Logar, Paktya violence, 12 August 2020, [url](#); Etilaatroz, دوه پاڅونوال وژل شوي [informal translation: Two insurgents killed in Paktya clashes], 12 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁴³⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 – 31 January 2021), 3 February 2021, [url](#)

2.28 Panjsher province

2.28.1 General description of the province



Map 28: Afghanistan - Panjsher province, source: UNOCHA³⁴³⁷

Panjsher province is located in the central region of Afghanistan and is divided into the following districts: Bazarak, Dara (or Hes-e Duwumi), Ab Shar (listed as temporary district by NSIA), Khenj (Hes-e Awal), Onaba (or Anawa), Paryan, Rukha and Shutul. The provincial capital is Bazarak.³⁴³⁸ Nearly the entire province consists of mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain,³⁴³⁹ located between the southern and south-eastern Hindu Kush mountain ranges.³⁴⁴⁰

According to estimates for 2019-20 by NSIA, Panjsher province has a population of 167 000.³⁴⁴¹

The main ethnic group in the province is Tajik.³⁴⁴² Other groups present include a minority of Hazara, Pashai, Nuristani and Ghilzai Pashtuns.³⁴⁴³ A small population of Kuchi is also reported to reside in Panjsher.³⁴⁴⁴

A road passing through Bagram district of neighbouring Parwan province connects Panjsher with Kabul.³⁴⁴⁵ The distance between Kabul and Bazarak is about 150 kilometres.³⁴⁴⁶ The deep and narrow

³⁴³⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial Reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 27

³⁴³⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Panjsher Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, November 2019, [url](#), p. 13

³⁴³⁹ Afghanistan, MRRD, National Area Based Development Program - Panjshir Provincial Profile, n.d., [url](#), p. 1

³⁴⁴⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Panjsher Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

³⁴⁴¹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 13

³⁴⁴² New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#)

³⁴⁴³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Panjsher Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#); US Naval Postgraduate School, Panjsher Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

³⁴⁴⁴ Afghanistan, MRRD, National Area Based Development Program - Panjshir Provincial Profile, n.d., [url](#), p. 2

³⁴⁴⁵ Fox News, Afghanistan's Beautiful 'Green Zone' Offers Emeralds, Peace, 23 May 2017, [url](#)

³⁴⁴⁶ Der Tagesspiegel, Das Panjshrital in Afghanistan: Mit dem Stolz der Löwen, 4 March 2015, [url](#)

gorge at the beginning of the Panjsher Valley, described as ‘tailor-made for obstruction and ambush’, has kept the province isolated and difficult to access.³⁴⁴⁷ Panjsher province has no functioning airport³⁴⁴⁸ and air traffic is regularly interrupted by bad weather conditions.³⁴⁴⁹

2.28.2 Conflict background and actors in Panjsher

Certain regions in Afghanistan, like Panjsher province³⁴⁵⁰ and the area of the central highlands, have been described as relatively safe and less affected by conflict-driven violence.³⁴⁵¹ According to an Afghan military expert cited by Pajhwok Afghan News, the relative stability of Panjsher as well as the central highland region is related to the social cohesion among its inhabitants, as most of them belong to the same ethnic or tribal group.³⁴⁵²

Panjsher province led the resistance against the Soviets and the Taliban during the 1980s and the 1990s. The province is home to Tajik Ahmad Shah Massoud, called the ‘Lion of Panjsher’, who fought against the Soviets and headed the Northern Alliance against the Taliban.³⁴⁵³ The Panjsheris, as the ethnic Tajiks of the Panjsher Valley are called, are known for their historical opposition to the Taliban and went on to dominate the initial post-Taliban order in both politics and security forces. Panjsheri leaders were key pillars in the creation of the Afghan government after the Taliban’s withdrawal in 2002.³⁴⁵⁴ Many Panjsheris have been members of the Afghan political and military elite, like former Minister of Defence/Vice President Muhammad Qasim Fahim (who was also an important leader of the Northern Alliance), former CEO and current chairman of the HCNR Dr. Abdullah and former NDS (National Directorate of Security) Chief/Minister of Interior and now Vice-President Amrullah Saleh.³⁴⁵⁵ Panjsher’s political spectrum is dominated by the *Jamiat-e Islami* party.³⁴⁵⁶

In September 2019, Ahmad Shah Massoud’s son, Ahmad Massoud, was reported to have started a new political movement in Panjsher, aiming to establish an anti-Taliban and pro-decentralisation front, following the footsteps of his father’s Northern Alliance.³⁴⁵⁷ In September 2020, the New York

³⁴⁴⁷ New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#)

³⁴⁴⁸ Falling Rain, Directory of Airports in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); MSF, Afghanistan: Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#); Afghanistan, ACAA, All Airports, 24 September 2017, [url](#)

³⁴⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 11

³⁴⁵⁰ Tolonews, Local Forces Mobilize to Purge Taliban Threats in Panjshir, 2 August 2019, [url](#); New York Times (The), At a Maternity Center Near a War Zone, 20 Births in One Day, 12 September 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Hits Northeast Afghan Province for First Time in Two Decades, 8 September 2020, [url](#); VOA, Taliban Fighters Attack Previously Spared Afghan Province, 8 September 2020, [url](#); IF RCRC, Emergency Plan of Action (EPoA) Afghanistan: Flash Floods, 9 September 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Repulse Panjshir Attack, 22 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁵¹ An international organisation Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 13; Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 12, 51; IOM, DTM Afghanistan, Community Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results Round 10 Jan-June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 8

³⁴⁵² Pajhwok Afghan News, 2017 Casualties: Nearly 25,000 People Killed, Wounded in Afghanistan, 14 January 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁵³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Former Mujahedin Sanctuary Now an Afghan Weekend Gateway, 25 August 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Hits Northeast Afghan Province for First Time in Two Decades, 8 September 2020, [url](#); VOA, Taliban Fighters Attack Previously Spared Afghan Province, 8 September 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan Vice President, Staunch Opponent of Taliban, Survives Blast, 9 September 2020, updated 15 September 2020, [url](#); Print (The), As Taliban-Afghan Govt Talk Peace, Lessons from an Afghan Hero Killed 19 Years Ago, 15 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁵⁴ New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#); New York Times (The), In Proud Corners of Afghanistan, New Calls for Autonomy, 28 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁵⁵ Telegraph (The), Afghanistan’s Former Spy Chief: ‘Never Trust the Taliban’, 13 August 2011, [url](#); New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan Rivals Sign Power-Sharing Deal as Political Crisis Subsides, 17 May 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), In Proud Corners of Afghanistan, New Calls for Autonomy, 28 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁵⁶ New York Times (The), Players Say Soccer Chief Sexually Abused Them for Years. He May Still Win, 18 March 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁵⁷ Asia Times, Afghanistan: Ahmad Massoud Seizes Father’s Torch, 5 September 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Son of Afghanistan’s ‘Lion of Panjshir’ Takes up Father’s Fight against Taliban, 10 September 2019, [url](#)

Times reported on a growing sentiment of distrust among Panjsheri towards the government in Kabul. Despite the province's ties to the Afghan capital through both money and power, Panjsher's deputy governor indicated 'Panjsheri's don't see themselves in the government anymore'. Concerns over fractured Afghan government's efforts to make peace with the Taliban are raising fears that Panjsher's residents might take up arms as independent militias and try to enforce more autonomy. Some factions in the province are reportedly openly calling for a renewal of the Northern Alliance, also known as the United Front.³⁴⁵⁸

After Kuran Wa Munjan district of neighbouring Badakhshan province was overrun by the Taliban at the end of July 2019, the militant group reportedly threatened Panjsher's Paryan district. The Long War Journal (LWJ) referred to Paryan district as surrounded by several other districts controlled or contested by the militant group, such as Pul-e Hissar and Khost Wa Firing districts in Baghlan province and Mandol district in Nuristan province. According to Taliban sources cited by LWJ, there has been a long-term military interest of the militant group in gaining control over strategic areas such as Panjsher province.³⁴⁵⁹ In response to this possible Taliban infiltration in Paryan district in August 2019, dozens of former *mujahideen* fighters and members of public uprising forces were reported mobilizing alongside the Afghan national security forces, to defend the area.³⁴⁶⁰

Until three reported incidents in September 2020 (see chapter on recent security trends), Panjsher province, described as a traditional stronghold of anti-Taliban sentiment,³⁴⁶¹ has never been attacked by the militant group during nearly two decades of war, although the Taliban had a presence in nearby provinces such as Nuristan, Baghlan, Badakhshan and Kapisa.³⁴⁶² In November 2020, American think-tank the Jamestown Foundation suggested the destabilization of Badakhshan province could have an impact on the situation in northern Afghanistan, including Takhar, Baghlan, Kunduz and Panjsher provinces.³⁴⁶³

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 12 March and May 2021, indicated all districts of Panjsher province as 'government-controlled' or 'undetermined'.³⁴⁶⁴ A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021³⁴⁶⁵ designated 97.75 % of Panjsher's territory under government control, 0 % under Taliban control and 2.25 % controlled by neither side. According to the same survey, 166 103 of Panjsher's inhabitants live in areas under government control, none of the province's population live in areas under Taliban control and 3 823 of Panjsher's residents live in areas controlled by neither side.³⁴⁶⁶

No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP have been recorded in Panjsher province between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021 by ACLED.³⁴⁶⁷ In a June 2020 USIP report, analyst Borhan Osman mentioned Panjsher as an area where ISKP has been recruiting for its Kabul cell.³⁴⁶⁸ In

³⁴⁵⁸ New York Times (The), In Proud Corners of Afghanistan, New Calls for Autonomy, 28 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁵⁹ LWJ, Taliban Threatens Panjshir Province, 4 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁶⁰ Tolonews, Local Forces Mobilize to Purge Taliban Threats in Panjshir, 2 August 2019, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban Threatens Panjshir Province, 4 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁶¹ BBC News, Afghanistan Conflict: IS Links to Kabul Student Killings Cause Outrage, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁶² VOA, Taliban Fighters Attack Previously Spared Afghan Province, 8 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁶³ Sukhankin, S., Central Asia's Specter of Insecurity: The View from Badakhshan to Fergana, The Jamestown Foundation, 20 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁶⁴ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

³⁴⁶⁵ Through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires, Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed a total of 1 266 respondents for this survey, randomly selected across the country. Pajhwok acknowledges the complexity of this task and the possible inaccuracy of the provided information.

³⁴⁶⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁶⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Panjsher province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁶⁸ Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join Islamic State, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 11-12

November 2020, BBC reported that the name of one of the assailants of the attack on Kabul University earlier that month (see chapter on Kabul City) suggested a link to Panjsher province. The attacker was referred to by ISKP with his *nom de guerre* 'Anas al-Banishiri'.³⁴⁶⁹

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, Panjsher province remained a poppy-free province.³⁴⁷⁰

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Panjsher was reported to be under the responsibility of the 201th ANA Corps and included in the Train, Advise and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-E is led by US forces and has its headquarters in Nangarhar province.³⁴⁷¹

2.28.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented no civilian casualties in Panjsher province.³⁴⁷² Resolute Support (RS) recorded between 0 and 50 civilian casualties in Panjsher province in the first half of 2020, with no variation between the first and second quarter of the year.³⁴⁷³ RS data on civilian casualties per province for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.³⁴⁷⁴

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data from reports in open sources on three incidents related to insurgents in Panjsher province, all coded as 'battles' ('armed clashes') between Taliban militants and ANDSF forces in September 2020. No other violent incidents were recorded in Panjsher during the reporting period. The districts Onaba (Anawa), Dara and Paryan each counted one battle.³⁴⁷⁵

On 6 September 2020, the Taliban reported that their fighters attacked a military checkpoint in Paryan district, purportedly killing five Afghan soldiers.³⁴⁷⁶ A few days later, on 8 September 2020, Taliban fighters attacked an Afghan police checkpoint in the Qala Tari area of Ab Shar district³⁴⁷⁷ (part of Dara district). During the clashes, a number of villagers were reportedly taken hostage (they were released later). According to local officials, the Taliban came from neighbouring provinces Nuristan or Laghman. Local residents reportedly took up arms and helped the Afghan security forces to expel the militants from the region.³⁴⁷⁸ This attack, on the 19th anniversary of the death of Ahmad Shah Massoud, was described as the first large-scale Taliban attack in Panjsher province in nearly two decades.³⁴⁷⁹ On 21 September 2020, the Taliban reportedly attacked a security forces' checkpoint in Onaba (Anawa) district, equally facing strong resistance from local residents and security

³⁴⁶⁹ BBC News, Afghanistan Conflict: IS Links to Kabul Student Killings Cause Outrage, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁷⁰ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³⁴⁷¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

³⁴⁷² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

³⁴⁷³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

³⁴⁷⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁷⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Panjsher province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁷⁶ Ariana News, Taliban Attack Abshar District in Panjshir, 8 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁷⁷ Temporary district (see above). ACLED indicated Ab Shar district as an official part of Dara district.

³⁴⁷⁸ VOA, Taliban Fighters Attack Previously Spared Afghan Province, 8 September 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Hits Northeast Afghan Province for First Time in Two Decades, 8 September 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Panjshir Border, Hostages Taken: Official, 8 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁷⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan Vice President, Staunch Opponent of Taliban, Survives Blast, 9 September 2020, updated 15 September 2020, [url](#)

personnel.³⁴⁸⁰ According to local officials, the insurgents entered Panjsher from Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan district in Kapisa province. At least three militants were reportedly arrested.³⁴⁸¹

On 23 August 2020, protests from local armed residents/militia forces were reported in Panjsher's capital Bazarak, thwarting an ANDSF operation to arrest Keramuddin Karim for assault. Karim, former provincial governor and head of Afghanistan's National Football Federation, was accused of sexual assault and harassment of female Afghan soccer players.³⁴⁸²

The WHO did not register any attacks related to health care provision in Panjsher province in 2020.³⁴⁸³ In October and November 2020 reports on mine contamination and cluster munition remnants, the Directorate of Mine Action Coordination (DMAC) in Afghanistan reported on possible cluster munition contamination and suspected hazardous areas in remote parts of Panjsher province.³⁴⁸⁴

Displacement

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Panjsher province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2020 - 28 February 2021. During the same period, UNOCHA collected data on 70 persons displaced to Panjsher province, coming from Baghlan (Khost Wa Fereng district), Badakhshan (Argo district), Laghman (Dawlatshah district) and Nuristan (Mandol district) provinces. These 10 IDP families arrived in Panjsher province in June, July, August and September 2020 and relocated to Bazarak, Khenj (Hes-e Awal) and Rukha districts.³⁴⁸⁵

³⁴⁸⁰ Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Repulse Panjshir Attack, 22 September 2020, [url](#); Pasbanan, Taliban Second Attack on Panjshir Province Failed, 22 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁸¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Rebels Storm Security Check-Post in Panjsher, 22 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁸² RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Operation Fails to Nab Ex-Soccer Chief Accused of Sexual Abuse, 24 August 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Saleh Warns Panjshir Officials over Forces Failed Attempt in the Arrest of Keramuddin Karim, 24 August 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan Soccer Official, Charged with Sexual Abuse, Evades Arrest, 24 August 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Special Forces Attempt Arrest of Ex-AFF President, 24 August 2020, [url](#)

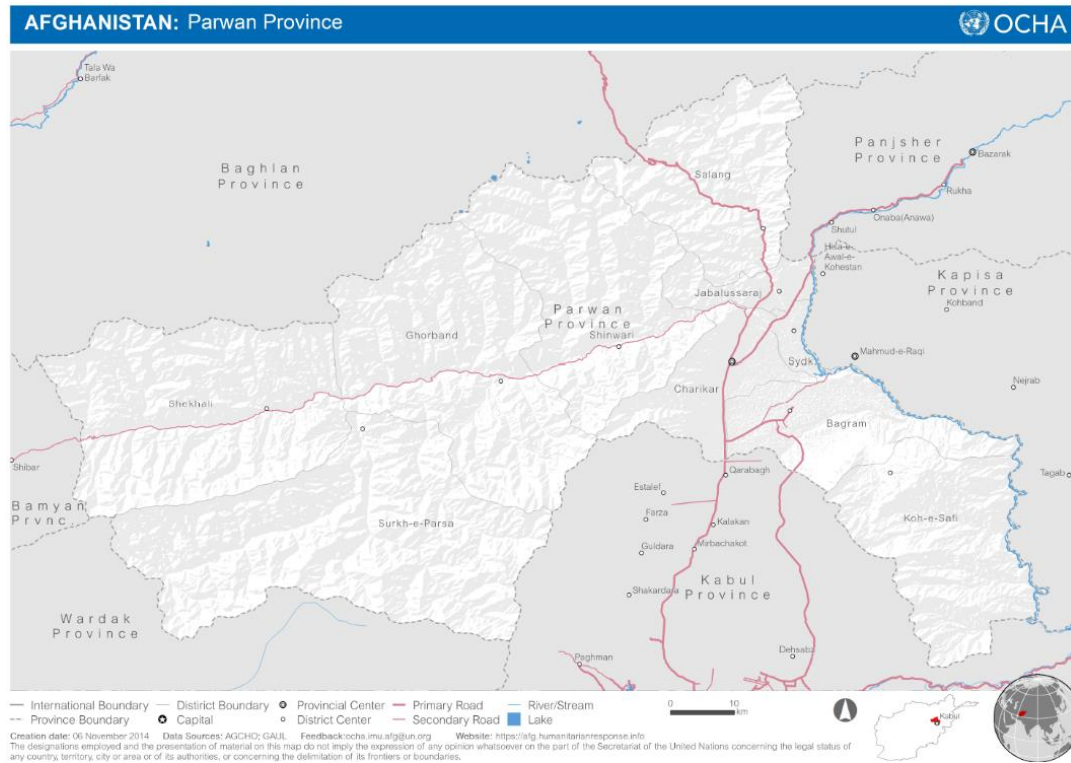
³⁴⁸³ WHO, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (January 01 - December 31, 2020), 11 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁴⁸⁴ Mine Action Review, Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2020, October 2020, [url](#), p. 18; Cluster Munition Coalition, Cluster Munition Monitor 2020: 11th Annual Edition, November 2020, [url](#), p. 48

³⁴⁸⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

2.29 Parwan province

2.29.1 General description of the province



Map 29: Afghanistan - Parwan province, source: UNOCHA³⁴⁸⁶

Parwan province is located in the central region of Afghanistan and is divided into the following districts: Bagram, Charikar, Ghorband (or Siya Gird), Jabalus Saraj, Koh-e Safi, Salang, Saydkhel, Shekhali, Shinwari and Surkh-e Parsa. The provincial capital is Charikar.³⁴⁸⁷ More than two thirds of the province consists of mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain.³⁴⁸⁸

According to estimates for 2019-20 by NSIA, Parwan province has a population of 724 561.³⁴⁸⁹

The main ethnic group in Parwan is Tajik, with a presence in every district of the province. Other groups present include Pashtun, Uzbek, Qizilbash, Kuchi and Hazara.³⁴⁹⁰ Shinwari district has a Pashtun majority and Ghorband district a significant Pashtun population,³⁴⁹¹ as well as Koh-e Safi district.³⁴⁹² Parwan's Hazaras mainly reside in the districts of Shekhali³⁴⁹³ and Surkh-e Parsa. According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig, Surkh-e Parsa is inhabited by a Sunni Hazara population, who 'traditionally are at odds with their Shiite fellow-Hazaras in neighbouring Bamian and therefore have always supported Hezb-e Islami (HIG)'.³⁴⁹⁴

³⁴⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial Reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 28

³⁴⁸⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Parwan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, November 2019, [url](#), p. 7

³⁴⁸⁸ Afghanistan, MRRD, National Area Based Development Program - Parwan Provincial Profile, n.d., [url](#), p. 1

³⁴⁸⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 7

³⁴⁹⁰ US Naval Postgraduate School, Parwan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

³⁴⁹¹ Ruttig, T., Ghorband - A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](#)

³⁴⁹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Parwan Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

³⁴⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Parwan Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

³⁴⁹⁴ Ruttig, T., Ghorband - A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](#)

The Salang Pass tunnel, located between the provinces of Parwan and Baghlan and purportedly used by more than 10 000 vehicles daily,³⁴⁹⁵ connects Kabul to northern Afghanistan.³⁴⁹⁶ The roads leading to the tunnel have been in a bad condition and lack proper maintenance.³⁴⁹⁷ In April 2020, USAID completed a power-infrastructure project next to the strategically located tunnel, through which reportedly over 80 % of Afghanistan's north-south trade passes.³⁴⁹⁸ A highway from Kabul runs through the districts of Charikar, Jabalus Saraj and Salang to Kunduz province. Another highway connecting Parwan to Bamyan province runs through the districts of Charikar, Shinwari, Ghorband, Shekhali and the Shibar Pass.³⁴⁹⁹ A small airport is reportedly located in Charikar district, no information has been found that this is a functioning airport for civil aviation.³⁵⁰⁰

At the end of August 2020, Parwan's district centre Charikar City was affected by severe flash floods causing the deaths and injuries of over 200 people and resulting in seriously damaged agricultural land and public infrastructure as well as hundreds of families displaced.³⁵⁰¹

2.29.2 Conflict background and actors in Parwan

In 2011, AGEs started to expand their activities into Parwan's Siya Gird (or Ghorband) and Shinwari districts, where the majority of the residents are Pashtun, and into Surkh-e Parsa district, where the Sunni Hazara majority sympathised with Hezb-e Islami (HIG) forces. The Pashtun areas of the Ghorband Valley have traditionally supported Hezb-e Islami during the civil war, but some of these structures have been absorbed by the Taliban since their regime in the 1990s. The Taliban in Parwan have also appointed Tajiks into their ranks to avoid limiting the insurgency exclusively to the Pashtun ethnicity. According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig, in the past, Parwan province has witnessed a long-established rivalry between Jamiat-e Islami and Hezb-e Islami (HIG), as several ethnic Tajiks affiliated with Jamiat were powerful strongmen and had important networks throughout the area. Many of them were in control of Parwan's administration and have reportedly actively contributed to the insecurity in the region.³⁵⁰²

The Kabul-Bamyan Highway, going through Jalrez district in Wardak province, has many side roads and mountain paths leading to several districts in Wardak, Parwan and Kabul provinces. According to AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, these serve as 'supply and escape routes' providing safe havens to militant groups and impeding the movement of government forces. For example, the unpaved road connecting Sanglakh in Jalrez district to Surkh-e Parsa district in Parwan is a difficult pass, neither safe nor accessible for military vehicles.³⁵⁰³

³⁴⁹⁵ Xinhua, Feature: Afghanistan's Vital Salang Pass Tunnel in Dire Need of Restoration, 17 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁹⁶ Diplomat (The), Fixing the Salang Pass Tunnel, 21 October 2015, [url](#); Tolonews, Road Works Underway on Salang Pass, 1 September 2018, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Through Mountain Passes and Taliban Land: the Longest Journey in the World for Covid-19 Samples, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁹⁷ Tolonews, Govt Reports Back on New Salang Tunnel Progress, 18 June 2018, [url](#); Xinhua, Feature: Afghanistan's Vital Salang Pass Tunnel in Dire Need of Restoration, 17 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁹⁸ USAID, Salang Tunnel Substation Overview, 5 December 2019, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 142; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 147

³⁴⁹⁹ Ruttig, T., Ghorband - A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Parwan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, IDC - MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#), p. 5

³⁵⁰⁰ Falling Rain, Directory of Airports in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); MSF, Afghanistan: Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#); Afghanistan, ACAA, All Airports, 24 September 2017, [url](#)

³⁵⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (24 - 30 August 2020), 2 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Flash Update No. 1: Localised Floods in Central and Eastern, 26 August 2020, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Flash Update: Conflict Displacement and Localised Flooding, 31 August 2020, [url](#), p. 1

³⁵⁰² Ruttig, T., Ghorband - A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](#)

³⁵⁰³ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 12 March and 26 May 2021, indicated Saydkhel, Koh-i Safi, Surkh-e Parsa, Shinwari and Ghorband (or Siya Gird) districts as 'contested'. LWJ designated Shinwari and Ghorband (or Siya Gird) districts as 'government-influenced'. Parwan's remaining districts were categorised as 'government-controlled' or 'undetermined' in this assessment.³⁵⁰⁴ A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021³⁵⁰⁵ designated 55.67 % of Parwan's territory under government control, 36 % under Taliban control and 8.33 % controlled by neither side. According to the same survey, 410 653 of Parwan's inhabitants live in areas under government control, 265 572 of the province's population live in areas under Taliban control and 61 475 of Parwan's residents live in areas controlled by neither side.³⁵⁰⁶

According to May 2020 reporting from the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team to the UN Security Council, the Taliban ordered increased supplies of ammunition and explosive materials for their forces in Parwan province.³⁵⁰⁷ In July 2020, AAN reported on the Taliban building up a presence to the northeast, north and northwest of Kabul, including in Koh-e Safi district of Parwan province.³⁵⁰⁸

In April 2020, the Taliban's head of intelligence for Shinwari district, known as Noor Mohammad or Omari, was killed during an operation in the Azgard area.³⁵⁰⁹ In June 2020, more than 200 Taliban fighters reportedly attacked public uprising forces in Koh-e Safi district. The attack was repelled by the security forces and 17 Taliban members were killed.³⁵¹⁰ In June-July 2020, Parwan's former provincial police chief and a former member of Parwan's provincial council declared to the New York Times that the Taliban have hired criminals from local networks as freelancers in Parwan, often blurring the lines of who carried out which attacks. According to the former police chief, a network that commissions criminals to carry out attacks is coordinated by Taliban commanders in Siya Gird and Shinwari districts. According to the former provincial council member, these criminals do not receive a monthly salary from the Taliban but get paid for the work done when the Taliban need them, adding that the Taliban have also hired freelance criminals in Bagram district.³⁵¹¹ In November 2020, a Taliban militant group of six members was reportedly arrested in Saydkhel district, after they had attacked the deputy police chief of the district.³⁵¹²

Three security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP have been recorded in Parwan between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021 by ACLED. In April 2020,³⁵¹³ August 2020 and December 2020,³⁵¹⁴ ISKP claimed responsibility for several rocket attacks targeting Bagram Airbase; no

³⁵⁰⁴ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.)

³⁵⁰⁵ Through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires, Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed a total of 1 266 respondents for this survey, randomly selected across the country. Pajhwok acknowledges the complexity of this task and the possible inaccuracy of the provided information.

³⁵⁰⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁰⁷ UN SECURITY COUNCIL, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³⁵⁰⁸ Ruttig, T. and Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁰⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Parwan: Taliban's District Intelligence Head Killed, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁵¹⁰ Tolonews, '17 Taliban Killed' in Parwan Attack: Official, 30 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁵¹¹ New York Times (The), Trump Got Written Briefing in February on Possible Russian Bounties, Officials Say, 29 June 2020, updated 16 November 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Suspicions of Russian Bounties Were Bolstered by Data on Financial Transfers, 30 June 2020, updated 29 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁵¹² Pajhwok Afghan News, 6-Member Taliban Group Detained in Parwan, 2 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁵¹³ RFE/RL, No Casualties in Rocket Attack on Largest U.S. Afghan Base, 9 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁵¹⁴ VOA, Rockets Hit US Base in Afghanistan; No Casualties Reported, 19 December 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Major US Airbase Comes under Rocket Attack, 19 December 2020, [url](#)

casualties were recorded by ACLED.³⁵¹⁵ In a June 2020 USIP report, analyst Borhan Osman mentioned Ghorband district as an area where ISKP has been recruiting for its Kabul cell.³⁵¹⁶

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, Parwan province remained a poppy-free province.³⁵¹⁷

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Parwan was reported to be under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps and included in the Train, Advise and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-E is led by US forces and has its headquarters in Nangarhar province.³⁵¹⁸ NDS unit 01 is reported to operate in the central region, including in Parwan province. This paramilitary CIA-backed militia has been allegedly accused of human rights abuses, such as involvement in extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and attacks on medical facilities.³⁵¹⁹ Parwan's Bagram district hosts Bagram Airbase, the largest NATO military base (with adjacent military airfield)³⁵²⁰ in Afghanistan,³⁵²¹ located 25 miles north of Kabul.³⁵²² Bagram town depends on the military base for its economy and supplies the base with a local work force, reportedly making it a preferred target for the Taliban.³⁵²³

2.29.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 76 civilian casualties (47 deaths and 29 injured) in Parwan province. This represented a decrease of 69 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were targeted killings, followed by ground engagements and non-suicide IEDs.³⁵²⁴ Resolute Support (RS) recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Parwan province in the first quarter of 2020.³⁵²⁵ In the second quarter of 2020, RS recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Parwan province.³⁵²⁶ RS data on civilian casualties per province for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.³⁵²⁷

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data from reports in open sources on 70 incidents related to insurgents in Parwan province, of which 36 were coded as 'battles', 25 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 9 as 'violence against civilians'.³⁵²⁸

³⁵¹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵¹⁶ Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join ISKP*, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

³⁵¹⁷ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020*, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³⁵¹⁸ USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

³⁵¹⁹ HRW, "They've Shot Many Like This" Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Clark, K., *CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitaries Accused of Grave Abuses: New Human Rights Watch Report*, AAN, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁵²⁰ *Falling Rain*, *Directory of Airports in Afghanistan*, n.d., [url](#); MSF, *Afghanistan: Country Kit*, 12 January 2016, [url](#)

³⁵²¹ LWJ, *Taliban Suicide Bomber Kills 3 Czech Soldiers*, 5 August 2018, [url](#); Ruttig, T., *First Breakthrough Toward Peace? A Look at the Seven-Day 'Reduction of Violence'*, AAN, 17 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁵²² Afghanistan, ACAA, *Aerodrome (AD) Part 3*, AIP Edition 90, 5 November 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³⁵²³ New York Times (The), *A Growing U.S. Base Made This Afghan Town. Now It's Dying*, 12 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁵²⁴ UNAMA, *Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

³⁵²⁵ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

³⁵²⁶ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

³⁵²⁷ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁵²⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

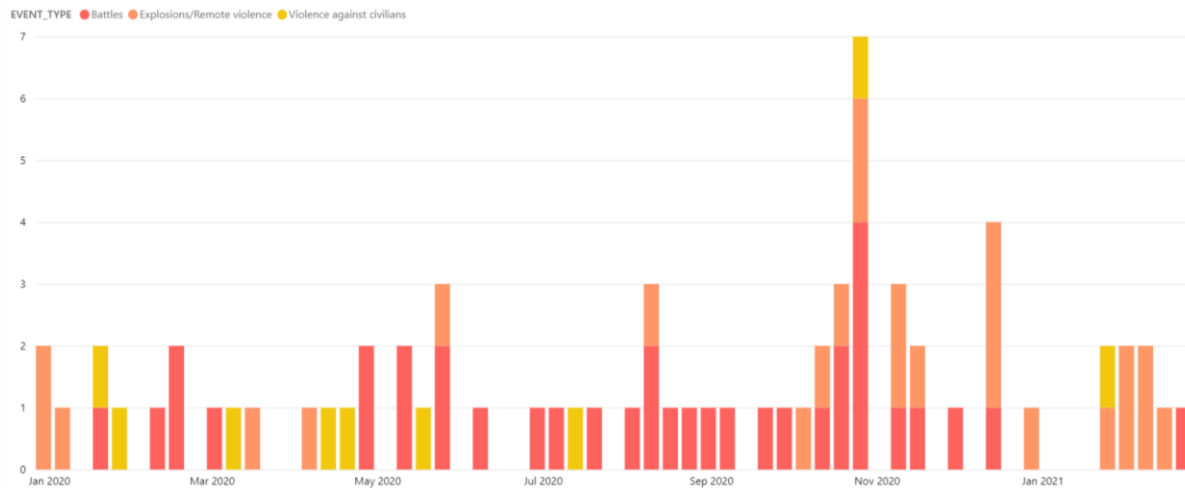


Figure 56: Parwan province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³⁵²⁹

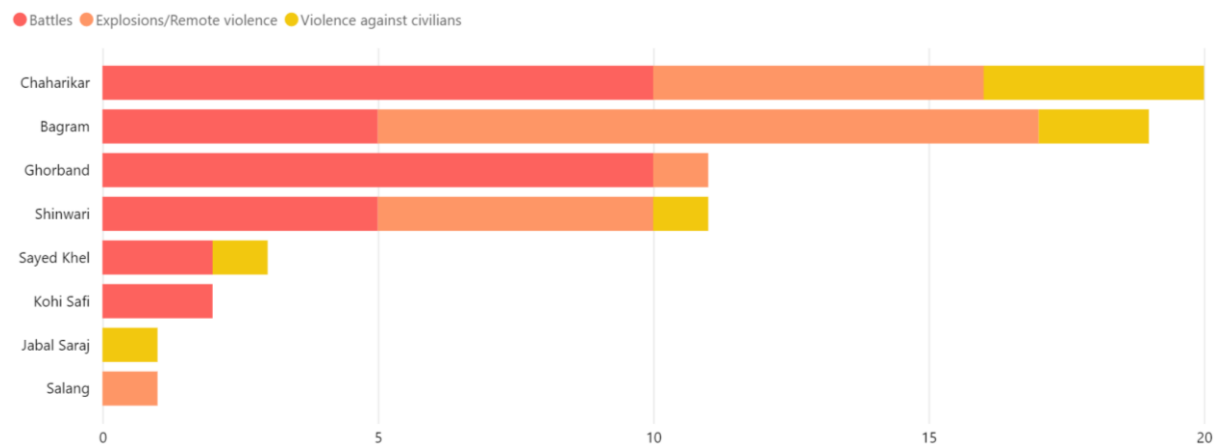


Figure 57: Parwan province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³⁵³⁰

ACLED recorded around 51 % of the violent incidents in Parwan as ‘battles’, all of which were coded as ‘armed clashes’. The majority of the armed clashes in Parwan were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police and NDS personnel as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis*³⁵³¹.³⁵³² Examples of such incidents included the targeting of security personnel by gunmen, such as the killing of an intelligence (NDS) officer and an accompanying civilian in Saydkhel district in September 2020,³⁵³³ the shooting of NDS officers in Bagram district in October 2020³⁵³⁴ and in February 2021,³⁵³⁵ the killing of the district police chief of

³⁵²⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵³⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 2 battles in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 - see introduction)

³⁵³¹ For more information on *arbaki*: see section 1.2.1 Pro-government forces.

³⁵³² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵³³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Intelligence Agent Gunned Down in Parwan, 5 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁵³⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁵³⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#)

Ghorband (Siya Gird) district alongside his security guard in November 2020,³⁵³⁶ ambushes on security convoys, for example in Shinwari and Charikar district in February 2020,³⁵³⁷ a Taliban attack on an ANP convoy on the Kabul-Parwan Highway in March 2020,³⁵³⁸ Taliban ambushes on *arbaki's* and policemen in Ghorband and Bagram districts in October 2020,³⁵³⁹ assaults on security checkpoints, for example in Ghorband (Siya Gird) district in May 2020,³⁵⁴⁰ in July 2020³⁵⁴¹ and in September 2020,³⁵⁴² in Koh-e Safi district in June 2020,³⁵⁴³ in Shinwari district in July 2020³⁵⁴⁴ and in August 2020³⁵⁴⁵ and in Charikar district in December 2020.³⁵⁴⁶ In some of these incidents civilian casualties were reported. For example in August 2020, Taliban militants attacked a security outpost in Bagram district and civilians escaping flash floods in neighbouring Kapisa province were caught in the crossfire.³⁵⁴⁷

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.³⁵⁴⁸ These involved for example operations by the Afghan military forces in Bagram district in February 2020, killing several Taliban militants, as well as operations by the Afghan police forces in Shinwari³⁵⁴⁹ and Ghorband districts in April 2020, killing a Taliban head of intelligence and a commander,³⁵⁵⁰ and operations in Saydkhel district in December 2020, resulting in several arrests and the seizing of ammunition.³⁵⁵¹

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented about 19 % of all reported security incidents in Parwan.³⁵⁵² For example in October 2020, a Taliban-planted roadside bomb killed three police officers in Salang district.³⁵⁵³ In various incidents in December 2020, several police officers as well as a prosecutor with his police guards were reportedly killed in magnetic IED blasts and roadside bombs in Bagram³⁵⁵⁴ and Charikar³⁵⁵⁵ districts. In January 2021, a

³⁵³⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, District Police Chief, Security Guard Shot Dead, 17 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁵³⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵³⁸ Tolonews, 'Taliban' Attack ANP Convoy in Bagram, 1 ANP Killed, 7 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁵³⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁴⁰ Tolonews, At Least 7 Afghan Forces Killed in 'Taliban' Attack in Parwan, 28 May 2020, [url](#); National (The), Afghanistan: First Deadly Attacks Since Ceasefire Kill 14, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁴¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁴² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁴³ Tolonews, '17 Taliban Killed' in Parwan Attack: Official, 30 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁴⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 4 Security Force Members Killed in Parwan Clashes, 13 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁴⁵ Reportedly, 11 Security Personnel Killed across Afghanistan, 25 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁴⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁴⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), I Lost Everyone': Floods Bruise a War-Wearied Afghanistan, 27 August 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Taliban Kill Four Survivors of Afghanistan Flash Floods, 27 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁴⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁴⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Parwan: Taliban's District Intelligence Head Killed, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁵⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁵¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Terror Suspects among 15 Held in Parwan, 30 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁵² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁵³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Policemen Killed in Parwan Roadside Bombing, 17 October 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Several Bombs Rock Afghanistan, Killing At Least Three, Taliban Denies Responsibility, 2 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁵⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Parwan Attorney Escapes Unhurt in Explosion, 29 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁵⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#)

police vehicle was hit by a landmine in PD 1 of Charikar City.³⁵⁵⁶ Information on civilian casualties reported during this incident was not found among the sources consulted. In the beginning of February 2020, Parwan's chief of police was targeted in an IED blast in Charikar city. He escaped the attack unharmed.³⁵⁵⁷ A few days later, two NDS personnel were reportedly killed and four more wounded in another magnetic IED blast in the provincial capital.³⁵⁵⁸ Some of these IED incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. In May 2020, explosives detonated at the site of electricity transmission towers in Charikar City, causing one death and four people injured among employees from the country's state electricity company Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS).³⁵⁵⁹ In February 2021, several civilians were killed and injured when the car of a former member of parliament was hit by a sticky bomb in Bagram district.³⁵⁶⁰

ACLED coded around 14 % of the violent incidents in Parwan as 'shelling, artillery and missile attacks'. For example, in January 2020 the Taliban reported to have conducted several missile attacks on Bagram Airbase.³⁵⁶¹ In April 2020, an ISKP-claimed rocket attack shelled the US military base of Bagram.³⁵⁶² Information on civilian casualties reported during both these incidents was not found among the sources consulted. At the end of May 2020, three members of a family were killed when a mortar shell fired by the Taliban (who reportedly denied their involvement in the attack) hit a civilian house instead of an ANDSF checkpoint in Ghorband district.³⁵⁶³ Mid-November 2020 the Taliban reported on three civilian deaths and five civilians wounded in Afghan military forces' shelling.³⁵⁶⁴ Mid-December 2020, several rockets were fired at Bagram Airbase.³⁵⁶⁵ Information on civilian casualties reported during this incident was not found among the sources consulted.

During the reference period, ACLED registered one suicide bomb attack and one air/drone strike in Parwan province.³⁵⁶⁶ In March 2020, a truck filled with explosives hit the gate of Bagram Airbase. No group claimed responsibility for the attack.³⁵⁶⁷ Information on civilian casualties reported during this incident was not found among the sources consulted. In October 2020, the Taliban reported on a US drone strike in Bagram district, killing one civilian.³⁵⁶⁸

ACLED categorised about 13 % of all reported violent incidents in Parwan as 'violence against civilians'.³⁵⁶⁹ These incidents involved for example: the shooting of an off-duty NDS employee and two civilians while travelling by car in the Qala-i Naw area of Charikar City in February 2020;³⁵⁷⁰ the killing of six local contractors working at Bagram Airbase in April 2020;³⁵⁷¹ the storming of a mosque

³⁵⁵⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Parwan Highway Police Commander Survives Blast, 27 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁵⁷ Reuters, Three killed in Wave of Bomb Attacks in Afghanistan, 2 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁵⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Intelligence Agents Killed, 4 Wounded in Parwan Blast, 8 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁵⁹ Tolonews, 1 Killed in Latest of 4 Attacks on Power Pylons: DABS, 5 May 2020, [url](#); National (The), Why Blackouts Are So Common in Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁶⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Injured in Parwan Sticky Bomb Blast, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁶¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁶² RFE/RL, No Casualties in Rocket Attack on Largest U.S. Afghan Base, 9 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁶³ Tolonews, 3 Civilians Killed in Shelling in Parwan, 31 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁶⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁶⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#); VOA, Rockets Hit US Base in Afghanistan; No Casualties Reported, 19 December 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Major US Airbase Comes under Rocket Attack, 19 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁶⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁶⁷ Khaama Press, Mini Truck Packed with Explosives Goes Off Close to Bagram Airfield, 22 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁶⁸ Voice of Jihad, 4 Children Martyred, Child, Women Injured, 5 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁶⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁷⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 Killed, NDS Worker Injured in Parwan Attack, 1 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁷¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Gunmen Kill Six Local Contractors near Main U.S. Base in Afghanistan, 17 April 2020, [url](#)

in the Khala Zayi area of Charikar City by unknown gunmen (the government blamed the Taliban, while the militants accused the government)³⁵⁷² in May 2020, causing more than a dozen casualties among worshippers,³⁵⁷³ the shooting of a tribal elder by unknown gunmen in Charikar City in June 2020,³⁵⁷⁴ the shooting of a religious scholar and his brother by unknown gunmen in Saydkhel district in July 2020,³⁵⁷⁵ the abduction of two doctors by unidentified armed men from a clinic in Bagram district in December 2020,³⁵⁷⁶ and the assassination of a religious scholar by unknown armed men on the way from Jabalus Saraj to Saydkhel district in January 2021.³⁵⁷⁷

On the highways connecting Parwan to its neighbouring provinces and to the capital, security incidents have been reported, such as the targeting of government officials on the Kabul-Parwan highway³⁵⁷⁸, and the killing of two Afghan engineers on that same highway in August 2020.³⁵⁷⁹

The WHO did not register any attacks related to health care provision in Parwan province in 2020.³⁵⁸⁰ In May 2020, several missiles were fired at transmission towers in the Gul Ghondi area of Charikar City, damaging the electricity pylons.³⁵⁸¹ In July 2020, UNOCHA reported on rising criminality in Parwan province.³⁵⁸² In January 2021, the head of a criminal armed group, accused of kidnapping, theft, extortion and intimidation, was arrested in Jabalus Saraj district. Residents of the district, cited by Pajhwok Afghan News, indicated an increase in armed robberies and extortion in the region.³⁵⁸³

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 - 28 February 2021, reporting 12 persons displaced from Parwan province, constituting a group of 2 families coming from Charikar district and finding refuge in Nangarhar province (Jalalabad district) in November 2020.³⁵⁸⁴

During the same period, UNOCHA collected data on 133 persons displaced to Parwan province, coming from Badakhshan (Baharak district), Kunduz (Aliabad district), Takhar (Chahab district), Faryab (Qasyar district) and Kapisa (Tagab district) provinces. These 19 IDP families arrived in Parwan province in August, September and October 2020 and found refuge in Charikar, Bagram and Jabalus Saraj districts.³⁵⁸⁵

According to an IOM community based needs assessment with data from January to June 2020, 38 % of IDP and returnee households in Parwan province, that have been heavily affected by conflict and natural disaster, live in shelters that are severely damaged or destroyed.³⁵⁸⁶

³⁵⁷² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁷³ Al Jazeera, Gunmen Attack Afghanistan Mosque Killing Many Worshippers, 19 May 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban's Claims Regarding the Deadly Mosque Attack in Parwan Province, 19 May 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 55

³⁵⁷⁴ Tolonews, Tribal Elder Killed in Attack by Unknown Gunmen in Parwan, 11 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁷⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁷⁶ Tolonews, 2 Doctors Abducted by Gunmen in Parwan, 29 December 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Doctors Abducted from Parwan Clinic, 29 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁷⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, 7 January 2021, updated 28 January 2021, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Religious Scholar Gunned Down in Parwan, 25 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁷⁸ Strategy Nord, Taliban Increase Tempo of Attacks near Kabul, 24 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁷⁹ Khaama Press, 2 Afghan Engineers Killed in Taliban Attack on Kabul-Parwan Highway, 13 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁸⁰ WHO, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (1 January – 31 December 31, 2020) 11 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁸¹ Tolonews, 1 Killed in Latest of 4 Attacks on Power Pylons: DABS, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁸² UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 - 12 July 2020), 15 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁵⁸³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Head of Extortionist Gang Arrested in Parwan, 20 January 2021, [url](#)

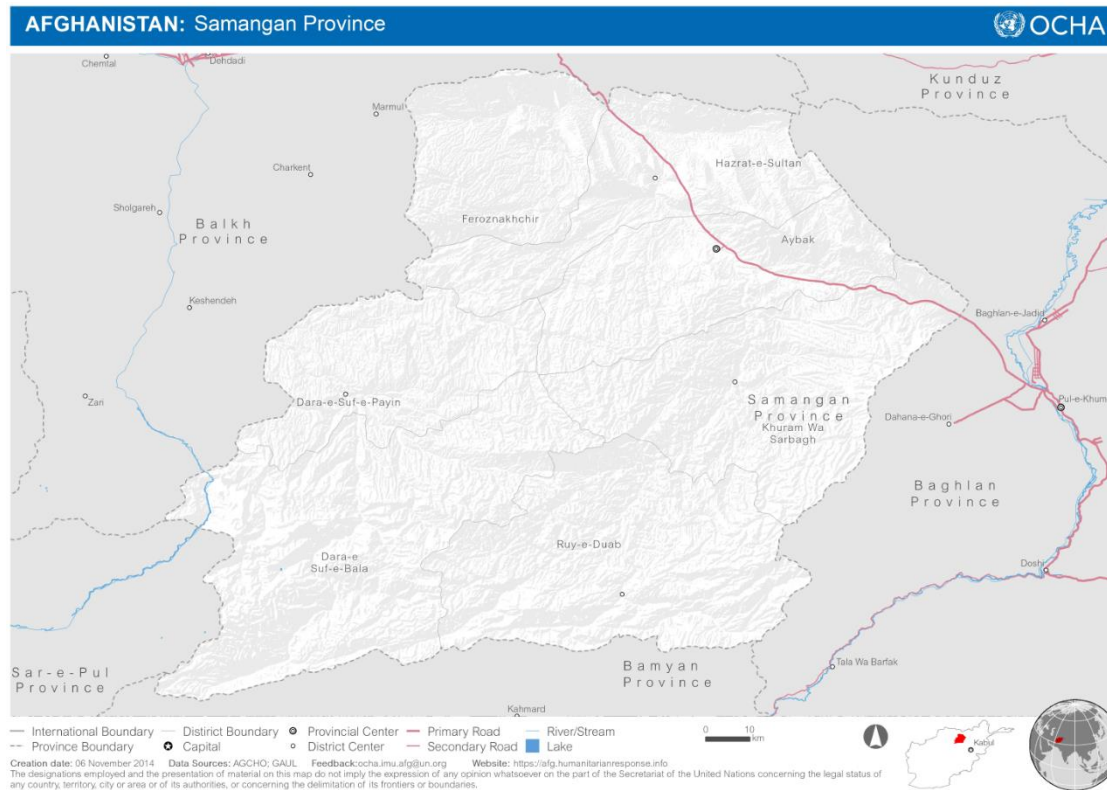
³⁵⁸⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁸⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁵⁸⁶ IOM, DTM Afghanistan, Community Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results Round 10 Jan-June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 12

2.30 Samangan

2.30.1 General description of the province



Map 30: Afghanistan – Samangan province, source: UNOCHA³⁵⁸⁷

Samangan province is located in the north of Afghanistan and is divided into the following districts: Aybak, Dara-i-Suf-e-Payin (Lower Dara-i-Suf), Dara-i-Suf-e-Bala (Upper Dara-i-Suf), Feroznakhchir, Hazrat-e-Sultan, Khuram Wa Sarbagh and Ruy-e-Duab.³⁵⁸⁸ The provincial capital of Samangan is Samangan City, formerly known as Aybak.³⁵⁸⁹

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 422 859, 116 281 of whom live in the provincial capital, Aybak.³⁵⁹⁰

The main ethnic groups in the province are Tajiks and Uzbeks. Other groups present include Pashtuns, Hazaras, Arabs, Tatars³⁵⁹¹ and Aimaqs.³⁵⁹²

Samangan province has a strategic position, to the north of the Hindu Kush.³⁵⁹³ The Ring Road connects Samangan/Aybak city with Mazar-e Sharif and the northern provinces until Herat (crossing

³⁵⁸⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 29

³⁵⁸⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 29; Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 30

³⁵⁸⁹ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁹⁰ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 3; 26

³⁵⁹¹ US Naval Postgraduate School, Samangan Provincial Review, n.d., [url](#)

³⁵⁹² Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Samangan, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

³⁵⁹³ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

Hazrat-e-Sultan district) and with Kabul to the east (crossing Khuram wa Sarbagh district).³⁵⁹⁴ Samangan province has no airport.³⁵⁹⁵

Afghanistan Analyst Obaid Ali pointed out in 2019 that control of Dara-I Suf-e Payin district's coal mines is a driving force that exacerbates the conflict in that district.³⁵⁹⁶ While the Taliban doesn't extract the coals in Dara-I Suf, it controls the highways, according to local officials.³⁵⁹⁷ According to The Liaison Office (TLO), Dan-e Toor and Gramak areas of the district are housing most illegally mined coals deposits in Afghanistan. Over 350 illegal mines are overseen by politicians, warlords and local power brokers.³⁵⁹⁸ According to statements by government and military officials in Samangan province in November 2020 and January 2021, the Taliban collected taxes from hundreds of trucks carrying coal from a local mine, generating between 26 000 USD and 38 500 USD³⁵⁹⁹ per day for the movement and funding their attacks across northern Afghanistan.³⁶⁰⁰

2.30.2 Conflict background and actors in Samangan

From early 2016 onwards, more attacks, incursions by the Taliban and fighting were reported in Samangan province.³⁶⁰¹

In previous years control over Dara-I Suf-e Payin's district centre has switched several times between government forces and the Taliban.³⁶⁰² In October 2019, the head of the provincial council claimed that the Taliban controlled the Dara-i-Suf - Aybak and Dara-i-Suf - Mazar-e-Sharif Highways, adding that they had also been in control of Dara-i-Suf-e-Bala and Dara-i Suf-e Payin districts' roads that connect both districts with Samangan City for the last three years and had taken control of roads between the two districts and Mazar-e-Sharif City.³⁶⁰³ In April 2020, the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reported on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with new appointments made in Samangan province.³⁶⁰⁴ Also in May 2020, Afghanistan analyst Thomas Ruttig reported frequent Taliban activity in mostly Taliban-controlled Dara-i Suf-e Payin and government-controlled Dara-i Suf-e Bala and added that the Taliban attacked Dara-i Suf-e Bala district several times in April 2020.³⁶⁰⁵ In January 2021 Samangan governor claimed between 400 and 600 Taliban fighters were active in the province, expressing fear that they might capture Dara-I Suf-e Payin and Dara-I Suf-e Bala districts.³⁶⁰⁶ As of 12 March and 26 May 2021 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Dara-i Suf-e Payin district as 'Taliban-controlled', Aybak district as 'contested' and the remaining districts in Samangan province as 'government-controlled'.³⁶⁰⁷ A

³⁵⁹⁴ Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#); MSF, Afghanistan Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#), pp. 1; 3; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014, [url](#), p. 46

³⁵⁹⁵ MSF, Afghanistan Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#), p. 3; Afghanistan, ACAA, All airports, 24 September 2017, [url](#)

³⁵⁹⁶ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁹⁷ Tolonews, Taliban Benefits from Coal Mine Business in Samangan: Official, 12 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁹⁸ TLO, The Real Cost of Coal, n.d., [url](#)

³⁵⁹⁹ 3 000 000 Afghani, converted with XE Currency Converter ([url](#)) on 19 March 2021

³⁶⁰⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Samangan governor seeks offensive against Taliban, 24 January 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), On Afghan Highways, Even the Police Fear the Taliban's Toll Collectors, 12 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁰¹ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁰² AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁰³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban increase tax on coal trucks in Samangan, 29 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁰⁴ UN Security Council, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para 16

³⁶⁰⁵ Ruttig, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balkhab District: Are the Taleban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁰⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Samangan governor seeks offensive against Taliban, 24 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁰⁷ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated. For more information on the methodology used by, see the Introduction section of this report.

survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021³⁶⁰⁸ designated 34.57 % of Samangan's territory under Taliban control, with no district fully under their control, and 55.43 % under government control, whereas the rest of the province is controlled by neither side, with the Taliban not fully controlling any of the districts in Samangan. According to the same survey, 148 826 of Samangan's inhabitants lived in areas under Taliban control and 238 614 of the province's population lived in areas under government control and 43 049 of Samangan's residents lived in areas controlled by neither side.³⁶⁰⁹

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, Samangan province remained a poppy-free province.³⁶¹⁰

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Samangan province was under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps and included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North was led by German forces and had its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.³⁶¹¹ Concerns were voiced over the ANA-Territorial Forces in Dara-I Duf-e Payin district where a commander had reportedly recruited only from one or two villages and in Ruy-e-Duab district, where a group of *mujahideen* commanders known for past abuses and still accused of similar abuses dominated the ANA-TF company.³⁶¹²

2.30.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 133 civilian casualties (12 deaths and 121 injured) in Samangan. This represents an increase of 196 % compared to 2019. More than two out of three civilian casualties in Samangan were caused by a large complex attack in provincial capital Aybak city on 13 July 2020.³⁶¹³ As a result, complex attacks were the leading cause of casualties in Samangan, followed by UXO/Landmines and targeted killings.³⁶¹⁴ Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 50 civilian casualties in Samangan in the first half of 2020, reporting similar numbers of civilian casualties between the first and the second quarter of 2020.³⁶¹⁵ RS data on civilian casualties per province for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.³⁶¹⁶

³⁶⁰⁸ Through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires, Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed a total of 1 266 respondents for this survey, randomly selected across the country. Pajhwok acknowledges the complexity of this task and the possible inaccuracy of the provided information.

³⁶⁰⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁶¹⁰ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³⁶¹¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12, p. 50; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

³⁶¹² Clark, K., Gaston, E. et.al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN and GPPI, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 66; 68; Clark, K. et al., Afghanistan's Newest Local Defence Force: Were "all the mistakes of the ALP" turned into ANA-TF safeguards?, AAN, August 2020, [url](#), pp. 24-25

³⁶¹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 46; 110

³⁶¹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

³⁶¹⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

³⁶¹⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, sources consulted by ACLED reported 46 violent events in Samangan province, of which 37 were coded as ‘battles’, 7 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 2 as ‘violence against civilians’.³⁶¹⁷

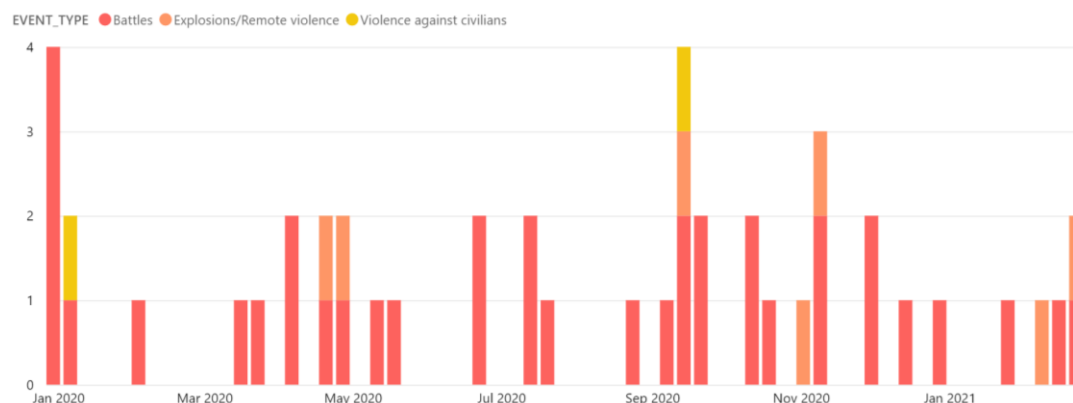


Figure 58: Samangan province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³⁶¹⁸

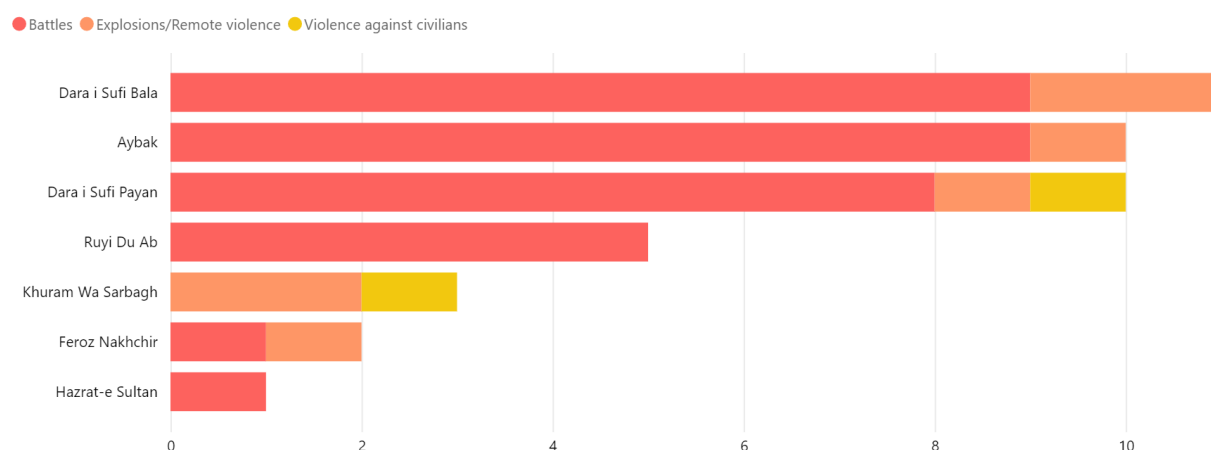


Figure 59: Samangan province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³⁶¹⁹

All coded ‘battles’ were ‘armed clashes’. The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police, NDS personnel, members of pro-government

³⁶¹⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Samangan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶¹⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Samangan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶¹⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Samangan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 4 battles in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

militias or local uprising forces,³⁶²⁰ attacks on their facilities such as checkpoints³⁶²¹ or headquarters,³⁶²² or clashes between ANDSF and AGEs,³⁶²³ sometimes involving air support.³⁶²⁴

The complex attack on the NDS headquarters in Aybak city on 13 July 2020³⁶²⁵ was coded by ACLED under 'armed clashes'. It was the first high-profile Taliban-claimed attack on a provincial capital in Afghanistan since the US-Taliban February 2020 deal.³⁶²⁶ This kind of attacks had become rarer since the February 2020 agreement.³⁶²⁷

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, such as an operation in Ruy-e-Duab district in August 2020³⁶²⁸ and including operations with air support, as in Dara-i Suf in January 2020³⁶²⁹ were also registered under armed clashes.³⁶³⁰

In January 2020 a Taliban group attack on the centre of Dara-i-Suf-e Payin was repelled.³⁶³¹ According to Afghanistan analyst Thomas Ruttig the Taliban attacked Dara-i-Suf-e Bala district several times in April 2020.³⁶³²

Out of seven incidents categorised by ACLED under 'explosions/remote violence', two were air strikes carried out by Afghan forces in Dara-i Suf-e Bala district³⁶³³, inflicting losses among AGEs in one incident in April 2020.³⁶³⁴ ACLED registered four incidents which involved the use of IEDs, including a roadside bomb explosion killing a territorial army soldier in Khuram Wa Sarbagh district in November 2020.³⁶³⁵ A civilian was killed and three others wounded in late February 2021 when unknown individuals threw a hand grenade to a gas shop and hotel in police district 1 of Aybak city.³⁶³⁶

Two incidents categorised by ACLED as 'violence against civilians' included the killing of civilians by the Taliban in an area under their control in Dara-i Suf-e Payin district in January 2020³⁶³⁷ and the killing of civilians by Afghan forces during operations, as reported by the Taliban in September

³⁶²⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Samangan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020,

[url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Uprising commander killed in Samangan, 12 November 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban kills 13 Afghan soldiers in Balkh province, 1 May 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, updated 30 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁶²¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 police killed in Aibak gun attack, 17 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁶²² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁶²³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Samangan clash: 13 Taliban killed, 5 injured, 18 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁶²⁴ Tolonews, '35 Taliban Killed' in Clashes with Security Forces: Officials, 27 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁶²⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 46

³⁶²⁶ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch, 3 August 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Taliban Stage a Major Attack, as Violence Intensifies in Northern Afghanistan, 13 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁶²⁷ Quilty, A., Taleban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan conflict has changed since the Doha agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁶²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Taliban militants killed in Samangan operation, 29 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁶²⁹ Afghanistan, Ministry of Defense (@MoDAfghanistan), [Twitter], posted on: 11 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁶³⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Samangan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's groups attack on Dara-i-Souf Paen district repulsed, 3 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁶³² Ruttig, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balkhab District: Are the Taleban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁶³³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Samangan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶³⁴ Khaama Press, Taliban militants suffer heavy casualties in preemptive airstrikes in Samangan, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁶³⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁶³⁶ RiV-Monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 24 February 2021, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Teenage boy killed in Samangan hand grenade attack, 26 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁶³⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, updated 30 January 2020, [url](#)

2020.³⁶³⁸ In addition to the incidents registered by ACLED, official sources reported the kidnapping of Dara-i Suf-e Bala district chief and two of his guards in Dara-i Suf-e Payin district on 24 February 2020.³⁶³⁹

The complex attack on the NDS headquarters in Aybak city on 13 July 2020 did not only cause several civilian casualties, but inflicted damage to several houses in the area as well.³⁶⁴⁰ According to a local official, houses three kilometres further away had broken windows as a result of the powerful blast.³⁶⁴¹

The WHO did not register any attacks related to health care provision in Samangan province in 2020.³⁶⁴² After initial reports of the closure by the Taliban of 35 out of 47 health centres in Samangan,³⁶⁴³ in January 2021 UNOCHA stated that 28 hospitals had been closed in Samangan since 4 November 2020. This impacted approximately 240 000 people who were in need of health services. Negotiations for reopening were being held.³⁶⁴⁴ At the time of drafting this report no update on the situation was available.

Without further specifying which provinces or districts were impacted, UNOCHA observed how civilian movements along main roads and roads between provincial capital and district centres were interrupted and humanitarian activities were obstructed in the northern region of Afghanistan due to clashes and illegal checkpoints in September 2020³⁶⁴⁵ as well as in January and February 2021.³⁶⁴⁶ The New York Times reported in February 2021 that the highways in the north, which are vital as they offer the limited options of traveling between provinces by road, 'have increasingly become the front line for an emboldened Taliban insurgency'.³⁶⁴⁷

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 6 706 persons displaced from Samangan, of which 6 517 (97 %) were displaced within the province. Others were displaced to Kabul and Jowzjan provinces. More than half were displaced from Dara-i Suf-e Payin district, while no displacement was registered from Dara-i-Suf-e-Bala and Feroznakhchir districts. During the same period, 6 944 persons were displaced to Samangan, nearly all from within the province and all relocating in Aybak district.³⁶⁴⁸

³⁶³⁸ Voice of Jihad, War Crimes (September 2020, 3 October 2020, [url](#))

³⁶³⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Insurgents kidnap district chief in Samangan, 2 February 2020, [url](#); 1TV, Taliban abduct Afghan district governor in Samangan: MoI, 24 February 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, At Least Six Killed In Afghanistan Despite 'Reduction Of Violence' Deal, 24 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁴⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁴¹ New York Times (The), Taliban Stage a Major Attack, as Violence Intensifies in Northern Afghanistan, 13 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁴² WHO, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (1 January – 31 December 2020), 11 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁴³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban close Samangan clinics over unpaid staff salaries, 28 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁴⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 – 10 January 2021), 13 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 – 20 September 2020), 23 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶⁴⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 – 10 January 2021), 13 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (11 – 17 January 2021), 19 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2 UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 – 24 January 2021), 27 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶⁴⁷ New York Times (The), Inside the Shadowy Militias Luring Unsuspecting Afghans to Fight, or Die, 4 February 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

2.31 Sar-e Pul

2.31.1 General description of the province



Map 31: Afghanistan – Sar-e Pul province, source: UNOCHA³⁶⁴⁹

³⁶⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 30

Sar-e Pul province is located in the north of Afghanistan and is divided into the following districts: Balkhab, Gosfandi, Kohestanat, Sancharak, Sar-e Pul, Sayad and Sozmaqala.³⁶⁵⁰ It became province of its own in 1988, when Jawzjan ceded it.³⁶⁵¹ The provincial capital is Sar-e Pul.³⁶⁵²

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 609 986, 173 719 of whom live in the provincial capital, Sar-e Pul.³⁶⁵³

The main ethnic group in the province are Uzbeks.³⁶⁵⁴ Other groups present include Hazaras, Tajiks, Pashtuns, Arabs, Aimaqs and Balochs.³⁶⁵⁵

The Ring Road does not run through Sar-e Pul province, but a main road connects the provincial capital of Sar-e Pul with Jawzjan's capital Shiberghan on the Mazar-e Sharif– Herat section of the Ring Road.³⁶⁵⁶

Oil wells near Sar-e Pul City are an important source of income for the province, and the Taliban try to either control or destroy them, as reported in January 2019.³⁶⁵⁷ In May 2020, a government official mentioned Taliban attacks on 14 oil wells in Sar-e Pul province.³⁶⁵⁸

2.31.2 Conflict background and actors in Sar-e Pul

Sar-e Pul province is said to have become a 'Taliban stronghold' since 2012. The administration as well as military structure of the Taliban network in Sar-e Pul has consisted mainly of non-Pashtun locals, reflecting the multi-ethnic character of the province. The insurgency used to get its fighters from the prevailing ethnic groups in the districts. For instance, in Kohestanat, the movement was mainly led by Aimaq and Tajiks, whereas in Sozmaqala it was mostly controlled by Uzbeks.³⁶⁵⁹ On 22 April 2020, the Taliban shared on their website, Voice of Jihad, a video introducing the Taliban governor of Balkhab district, Mawlawi Mehdi Mujahed, a Shia Hazara.³⁶⁶⁰ This evoked surprise in some Twitter comments by journalists working for international media and in Afghan media reports, that stressed the fact that this was the first time a Shia Hazara Taliban commander was presented.³⁶⁶¹ This ethno-religious group is barely represented in the Taliban movement, as Afghanistan analyst Thomas Ruttig points out. Looking into the Taliban presence in Balkhab district and Mehdi's background, Thomas Ruttig considered this was an exceptional case but concluded that with only a small group of fighters under his command and not having a presence in the district, Mehdi's military relevance was low and his appointment could hardly change the perception and mistrust among

³⁶⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Sar-e Pul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³⁶⁵¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Sar-i-Pul province, n.d., [url](#)

³⁶⁵² Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Sar e Pul, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

³⁶⁵³ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 3; 28

³⁶⁵⁴ US Naval Postgraduate School, Sar-i-Pul Provincial Review, n.d., [url](#); Ali. O., Non-Pashtun Taleban in the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

³⁶⁵⁵ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Sar e Pul, 1 February 2017, [url](#); Ali. O., Non-Pashtun Taleban in the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

³⁶⁵⁶ Afghanistan, IDC - MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#), p. 5; MSF, Afghanistan Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#), pp. 1; 3; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Northern region, District Atlas, 13 April 2014, [url](#), p. 54

³⁶⁵⁷ Reuters, Taliban threaten oil fields in northern Afghanistan, 4 January 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁵⁸ Salaam Times, In favour of darkness: the Taliban's war on Afghan infrastructure, 18 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁵⁹ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban in the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

³⁶⁶⁰ Voice of Jihad, *مصاحبه استدیویی الامارة با مسئول ولسوالی بلخاب ولایت سرپل محترم (مولوی مهدی به جهاد غبر)* [informal translation: Al Emarah Studio has published the interview with Mawlawi Mahdi Mujahid, responsible for Balkhab district of Sar-e Pul province], 22 April 2020, [url](#); Voice of Jihad, Video: Interview with governor of Balkhab – Mawlawi Mahdi Mujahid, 24 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁶¹ Nasr, W. (@SimNasr), [Twitter], posted on: 22 April 2020, [url](#); Mehsud, I. T. (@IhsanTipu), [Twitter], posted on: 22 April 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban appoints first Shia Hazara as shadow district chief of the group, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

Hazaras of the Taliban. However it showed how switching alliances, even between unexpected sides, could occur as a result of complicated local power balance.³⁶⁶²

An Afghanistan analyst contacted by the Swedish Migrations Agency in January 2020, considered Sar-e Pul and Faryab to be the most Taliban-controlled or influenced provinces in the northern region.³⁶⁶³ As of 12 March and 26 May 2021 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Kohestanat district as 'Taliban-controlled', Balkhab district as 'government-controlled' and the remaining districts in Sar-e Pul province as 'contested'.³⁶⁶⁴ A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021³⁶⁶⁵ designated 64 % of Sar-e Pul's territory under Taliban control and 36 % under government control. According to the same survey, 397 441 of Sar-e Pul's inhabitants lived in areas under Taliban control and 223 561 of the province's population lived in areas under government control. Kohestanat district was one of a few districts in Afghanistan where government employees were working from the provincial capital or other safe areas due to the Taliban controlling the district centre.³⁶⁶⁶

According to AAN, Central Asian militants from the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) have been active in Sar-e Pul province and operating alongside the Taliban since 2015. IJU militants are mainly Uzbeks from Uzbekistan, who have settled in Kohestanat district. Their main activity in the province has consisted in offering military training to new Taliban recruits. While their exact number is unclear their number is reported to be small, with around 25 fighters and 15 family members.³⁶⁶⁷ AAN found no evidence of the presence of militants affiliated with ISKP in Sar-e Pul province, as claimed by several sources mid-2018, noting that existing reporting and locals may have confused ISKP with the IJU.³⁶⁶⁸ No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Sar-e Pul province between 1 Jan 2020 and 28 February 2021.³⁶⁶⁹

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Sar-e Pul province increased by 22 %.³⁶⁷⁰

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Sar-e Pul province was under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps and included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North was led by German forces and had its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.³⁶⁷¹

³⁶⁶² Ruttig, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balkhab District: Are the Taleban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁶³ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 47

³⁶⁶⁴ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

³⁶⁶⁵ Through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires, Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed a total of 1 266 respondents for this survey, randomly selected across the country. Pajhwok acknowledges the complexity of this task and the possible inaccuracy of the provided information.

³⁶⁶⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁶⁷ Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

³⁶⁶⁸ Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

³⁶⁶⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Sar-e Pul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁷⁰ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³⁶⁷¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12, p. 50; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

2.31.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 161 civilian casualties (56 deaths and 105 injured) in Sar-e Pul. This represents a decrease of 26 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted killings and non-suicide IEDs.³⁶⁷² Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Sar-e Pul in the first half of 2020, reporting an increase in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.³⁶⁷³ RS data on civilian casualties per province for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.³⁶⁷⁴

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, sources consulted by ACLED reported 99 violent events in Sar-e Pul province, of which 71 were coded as 'battles', 21 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 7 as 'violence against civilians'.³⁶⁷⁵

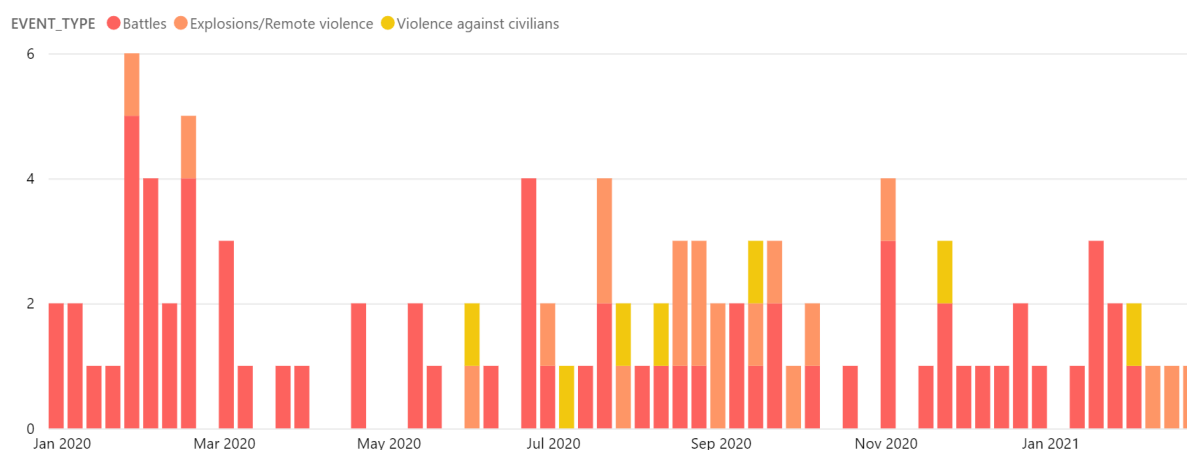


Figure 60: Sar-e Pul province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³⁶⁷⁶

³⁶⁷² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

³⁶⁷³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

³⁶⁷⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁷⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Sar-e Pul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁷⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Sar-e Pul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

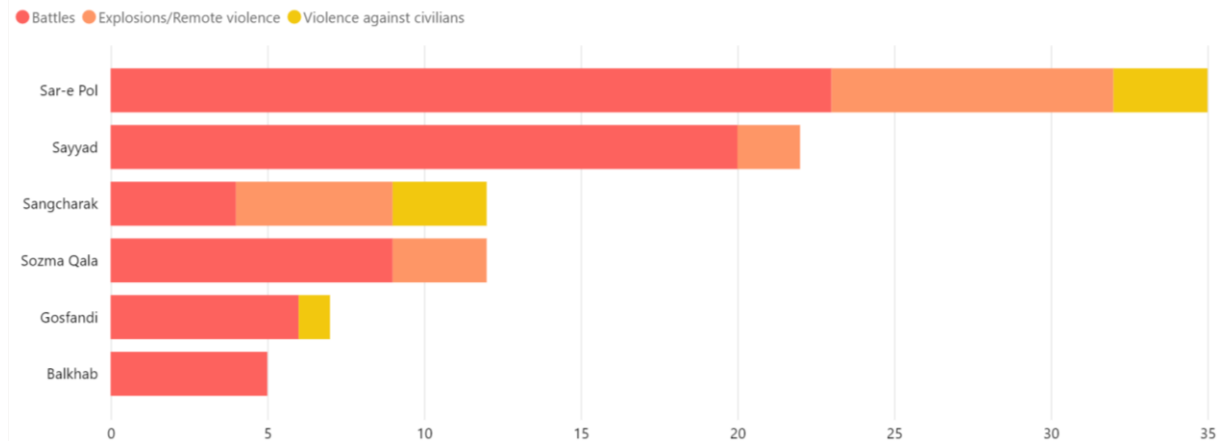


Figure 61: Sar-e Pul province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³⁶⁷⁷

Of the battles, nearly all concerned ‘armed clashes’.³⁶⁷⁸ The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS personnel, and members of pro-government militias³⁶⁷⁹, attacks on their facilities such as checkpoints³⁶⁸⁰, military bases³⁶⁸¹ or clashes between ANDSF and AGEs.³⁶⁸² At times these incidents resulted in civilian casualties, as for example on 17 February 2020, when the Taliban attacked military bases and houses in Sayad district, killing a child and injuring two other civilians.³⁶⁸³ Two civilians were killed and another was wounded by crossfire in Gosfandi district in March 2020.³⁶⁸⁴

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, were also registered by ACLED under armed clashes.³⁶⁸⁵

Civilian casualties were reported in a number of 21 reported incidents of ‘explosions/remote violence’ in Sar-e Pul province registered by ACLED between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021.³⁶⁸⁶ For example, on 2 September 2020, six children were killed in a bomb explosion inside a house in Sancharak district. A farmer was killed in the same district, also in September 2020, by a bomb planted in a wheatfield by the Taliban.³⁶⁸⁷ Three civilians were among the people killed when a military convoy was hit by two roadside bombs in Sar-e Pul city in October 2020.³⁶⁸⁸

³⁶⁷⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Sar-e Pul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 6 events (4 battles and 2 remote violence) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

³⁶⁷⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Sar-e Pul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁷⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁸⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 Taliban killed, as many injured in Sar-i-Pul battle, 16 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁸¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁸² Xinhua, Taliban key commander killed in Afghanistan's northern Sari Pul province, 20 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁸³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁸⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁸⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Sar-e Pul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁸⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Sar-e Pul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁸⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁸⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

Seven incidents categorised by ACLED as ‘violence against civilians’ included the wounding and killing of civilians for unknown or unclear reasons, mostly by the Taliban,³⁶⁸⁹ and the killing of an English teacher and the abduction of another teacher by the Taliban in Sar-e Pul city in July 2020.³⁶⁹⁰ In addition to the incidents registered by ACLED, the New York Times reported about the killing in February 2020 of three former Taliban members who were living a civilian life in Sar-e Pul district.³⁶⁹¹ Also Afghan news agency Pajhwok reported about the kidnapping and release after a few days of five members of a health care team in Kohestanat district in January 2020.³⁶⁹² According to Kabul-based news service reportedly a woman was killed by the Taliban in Sancharak district in March 2020 for criticizing the Taliban’s war against the government forces.³⁶⁹³ UNAMA documented the abduction of a young man and a pregnant girl by the Taliban on 6 July 2020. After being released by the Taliban the girl was tortured and killed by her family.³⁶⁹⁴ Inayatullah Faizi, Sar-e Pul municipality’s financial and administrative director or Sar-e Pul’s deputy mayor, depending on the source, was killed by unknown armed men on 2 November 2020.³⁶⁹⁵ Afghan Peace Watch initiative, RiV-Monitoring, reported on the killing of a women, wife of an ANA soldier, by the Taliban in Sozma Qala district in January 2021.³⁶⁹⁶

Security incidents were reported in Sar-e Pul province, on the highway connecting the province to Jawzjan, throughout 2020³⁶⁹⁷ and in January 2021,³⁶⁹⁸ as well as on the road between Sozma Qala and Sar-e Pul in December 2020.³⁶⁹⁹ Without further specifying which provinces or districts were impacted, UNOCHA observed how civilian movements along main roads and roads between provincial capital and district centres were interrupted and humanitarian activities were obstructed in the northern region of Afghanistan due to clashes and illegal checkpoints in September 2020³⁷⁰⁰ as well as in January and February 2021.³⁷⁰¹ Despite reassurances and promises by the Afghan security forces about improving the security on the northern highways, the situation worsened in the last quarter of 2020. Passengers complained about increasing insecurity, the presence of Taliban checkpoints, extortion and threats by the Taliban or other armed men.³⁷⁰² The New York Times reported in February 2021 that the highways in the north, which are vital as they offer the limited

³⁶⁸⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban shoot injured my daughter, grandchildren: Sar-i-Pul man, 1 February 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 6 August 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁹⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁹¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Sar-i-Pul province, 16 January 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Around 58,000 Sar-i-Pul children to miss polio drops, 27 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁹³ Reportedly, Pregnant Woman Shot in Sar-e Pul Province by Taliban for Calling Their War ‘Unjust’, 20 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 32

³⁶⁹⁵ Reportely (@reporterlyaf), [Twitter], posted on: 2 November 2020, [url](#); RiV-Monitoring (@rivmonitoring), [Twitter], posted on: 2 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁹⁶ RiV-Monitoring, A woman assassinated in Sar-e-Pul, 8 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 – 13 December 2020), 16 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2; RiV-Monitoring, 1 ANA soldier killed in Sari-Pul - Jawzjan highway, 25 November 2021, [url](#); RiV Monitoring, 2 Taliban rebels killed 3 wounded in Sar-e-Pul, 8 October 2020, [url](#); RiV Monitoring, 2 soldiers wounded in Sar-e-Pul blast, 19 September 2020, [url](#); RiV Monitoring, 7 militants killed in Sar-e-Pul, 15 September 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁹⁸ RiV Monitoring, A police officer killed in Sare-Pul, 3 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁶⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 – 13 December 2020), 16 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 – 20 September 2020), 23 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 – 28 February 2021), 2 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 – 10 January 2021), 13 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (11 – 17 January 2021), 19 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 – 24 January 2021), 27 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷⁰² Afghanistan Times, Passengers, drivers affected by security situation in north, 21 October 2020, [url](#); Payk Fact-Check, Security Situation In The Northern Highways Of The Country Have Gotten Worse, Instead Of Getting Better, 9 December 2020, [url](#)

options of traveling between provinces by road, 'have increasingly become the front line for an emboldened Taliban insurgency'.³⁷⁰³

The WHO registered the capture of four health care providers and the release of one in Sar-e Pul province in 2020.³⁷⁰⁴ In July 2020, the WHO expressed concern about the potential disruption on timely assessment and response in some of the northern provinces, including Sar-e Pul due to the security threat on the Mazar-Shiberghan-Faryab highway.³⁷⁰⁵

There were Twitter posts by Afghanistan-based journalists about a school being set on fire in Balkhab district at the end of November 2020, blaming the Taliban.³⁷⁰⁶

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 11 117 persons displaced from Sar-e Pul (more than half from Sancharak and Sar-e Pul districts), 9 759 (88 %) of whom were displaced within the province, while a few hundred IDPs were displaced from Sayad, Sancharak and Gosfandi districts to Shiberghan in Jowzjan province and a few dozen to Faryab and Ghor provinces. During the same period, 11 642 persons were displaced to Sar-e Pul, most to Sar-e Pul district, the others to Sancharak. Sar-e Pul also hosted IDPs from Faryab, Jowzjan and Balkh provinces.³⁷⁰⁷

The largest displacement within Sancharak took place in August 2020 around the time when airstrikes targeting the Taliban were carried out in the district. All IDPs were displaced within the district.³⁷⁰⁸

³⁷⁰³ New York Times (The), Inside the Shadowy Militias Luring Unsuspecting Afghans to Fight, or Die, 4 February 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁰⁴ WHO, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (January 01 - December 31, 2020) 11 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁰⁵ WHO, Situation Report, Afghanistan, Emergency Type: protracted emergency, July 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁰⁶ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 29 November 2020, [url](#); Abed, F. (@fahimabad), [Twitter], posted on: 29 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#); EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Sar-e Pul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)



2.32 Takhar

2.32.1 General description of the province



Map 32: Afghanistan – Takhar province, source: UNOCHA³⁷⁰⁹

³⁷⁰⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

Takhar province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Badakhshan to the east, Panjshir and Baghlan to the south and south-west and Kunduz to the west and an international border with Tajikistan to the north.³⁷¹⁰ Takhar province is divided into the following administrative units: Baharak, Bangi, Chahab, Chal, Darqad, Dasht-e-Qala, Eshkamesh, Farkhar, Hazar Sumuch, Kalafgan, Khwajabahawuddin (Khwaja Bahawuddin), Khwajaghar (also Khwaja Ghar), Namakab, Rostaq, Taloqan, Warsaj and Yangi Qala.³⁷¹¹ The provincial capital is Taloqan.³⁷¹²

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1 073 319, of which 253 735 live in the provincial capital, Taloqan.³⁷¹³

The main ethnic group in the province are Uzbeks and Tajiks.³⁷¹⁴ Other groups present include Pashtuns³⁷¹⁵, Hazaras³⁷¹⁶ and Arabs³⁷¹⁷.

The Kunduz-Takhar Highway runs through the districts of Kalafgan, Taloqan and Bangi.³⁷¹⁸ As in other provinces, reports of Taliban attacks on travellers and military convoys have been reported, with armed clashes frequently blocking road access.³⁷¹⁹

2.32.2 Conflict background and actors in Takhar

In Takhar, Taliban fighters started to emerge in 2010 in Darqad, Khwajabahawuddin, and Yangi Qala districts³⁷²⁰, but after making some territorial gains in 2014, an AAN report of 2017 stated that Taliban were not able, at that time, to 'establish a stronger foothold' in Takhar.³⁷²¹ In May 2019, journalist Bilal Sarwary noted an increased Taliban presence in Takhar province.³⁷²² According to Afghanistan analysts Obaid Ali and Thomas Ruttig their presence had grown in most parts of Takhar over the past few years and several offensives in the province, in 2019, enabled them to expand their control towards Taloqan City³⁷²³, raising concern among the local people.³⁷²⁴ In October 2020, a media report claimed that 11 of Takhar's districts had been 'largely controlled by Taliban fighters for years'.³⁷²⁵ As of February 2021, an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Baharak, Chahab, Khwajaghar and Yangi Qala districts as 'Taliban-controlled', Bangi, Darqad, Dasht-e Qala, Eshkamesh, Khwajabahawuddin and Taloqan districts as 'contested' and the remaining districts in Takhar province as 'government-controlled'. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Khwajaghar, Yangi Qala,

³⁷¹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³⁷¹¹ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Takhar, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, November 2019, [url](#), p. 24

³⁷¹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., [url](#)

³⁷¹³ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-20, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 24

³⁷¹⁴ Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁷¹⁵ Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁷¹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., [url](#); US Naval Postgraduate School, Takhar Provincial Review, n.d., [url](#)

³⁷¹⁷ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Takhar, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

³⁷¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

³⁷¹⁹ Xinhua, 25 policemen killed in Afghanistan's northern Takhar province, 21 October 2020, [url](#); Salaam Times, Taliban continue extortion, killing of travellers on highways 06 August 2020, [url](#); Menafn, Afghanistan- Highway blocked due to Taliban attacks in north, 15 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁷²⁰ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#); Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁷²¹ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

³⁷²² Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 22 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁷²³ Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁷²⁴ Afghanistan Times, Rampant insecurity stymies peace in Takhar, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁷²⁵ Al Jazeera, Taliban ambush kills dozens of Afghan forces in northern province, 21 October 2020, [url](#)

Nama Akab, Farkhan and Chal districts shifted to 'contested'.³⁷²⁶ At the same time, a survey by Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021, designated 56.8 % of Takhar's territory under government control, 35.3 % under Taliban control, and 7.9 % controlled by neither side. According to the same survey, 620 490 of Takhar's inhabitants lived in areas under government control, 385 797 of the province's population lived in areas under Taliban control and 86 804 of Takhar's residents lived in areas controlled by neither side.³⁷²⁷

Besides the Taliban, militants from ISKP, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), drug runners and criminals were reportedly active along the Tajik border in 2018³⁷²⁸, as well as members of the terrorist movement Jundullah, a splinter group of IMU, mainly composed of non-Pashtun³⁷²⁹ Afghans.³⁷³⁰

Militants affiliated to IMU, Jundullah and the Taliban fought alongside each other against the Afghan security forces until the end of 2014. In mid-2015, the IMU allied with the IS, which led to the Taliban ordering the disarmament and even the killing of some Uzbek Jundullah fighters in order to prevent them from allying with the IS, as IMU did.³⁷³¹ Since 2017, it is reported that AGEs affiliated with IMU and Jundullah continue to fight autonomously from the Taliban. Although the three groups share the same religious views, as they all follow the Hanafi school of law, the IMU and Jundullah ignore local culture, such as the role of elders in conflict resolution and in other important issues.³⁷³²

More recently, a February 2019 AAN report stated that Jundullah's military wing, Jabha-ye Qariha, was operating in some northern districts of Takhar province.³⁷³³ Meanwhile, a small number of Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) fighters, a movement mainly composed of Uzbeks from Uzbekistan, who were part of an independent front called Imom Buxoriy Katiba (Imam Bukhari's Battalion), was reportedly active in Takhar in 2018, according to a September 2018 AAN report.³⁷³⁴ In May 2020, the UN reported that IJG, led by Ilimbek Mamatov, 'consists of approximately 250 fighters, operating primarily in the Afghan provinces of Badakhshan, Sari Pul, Zabul and Takhar'.³⁷³⁵ Additionally, in its May 2020 and July 2020 reports, the UN confirmed the presence of ETIM in Takhar.³⁷³⁶

³⁷²⁶ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

³⁷²⁷ For this survey Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed (through telephone interviews or by distributing questionnaires) a total of 1 266 respondents, randomly selected across the country; Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁷²⁸ RFE/RL/Gandhara, In The Dark: Tajik Border Residents Live Not Knowing What Lies Beyond, 22 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁷²⁹ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

³⁷³⁰ Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat's IS-affiliated 'island' survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018, [url](#)

³⁷³¹ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

³⁷³² Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

³⁷³³ Ali, O., One Land, Two Rules (3): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Dasht-e Archi district in Kunduz province, AAN, 26 February 2019, [url](#)

³⁷³⁴ Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, [url](#); UN Security Council, Islamic Jihad Group (IJU), 18 January 2018, [url](#)

³⁷³⁵ UN Security Council, Twenty-fifth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/53, 20 January 2020, [url](#), para. 60

³⁷³⁶ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 88; UN Security Council, Twenty-sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2020/717, 23 July 2020, [url](#), para. 67

While a researcher for the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) mentioned small pockets of ISKP emerging in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces in August 2019³⁷³⁷, more recent reports with regards to the activity of the group in Takhar were not available.³⁷³⁸

According to the 2020 UNODC opium survey, Takhar province remained poppy-free, as in the previous year.³⁷³⁹ Drug smuggling routes leading into Central Asia run through some districts of Takhar province, in particular Khwajabahawuddin district, according to a source on the ground.³⁷⁴⁰ According to the UN, heroin produced in Badakhshan province is smuggled through Takhar in 'consignments up to 100 kilograms. From there, heroin proceeded through Kunduz Province, across less guarded borders into Tajikistan and towards the capital Dushanbe'.³⁷⁴¹

In terms of the presence of government security forces, a July 2019 SIGAR report stated that Takhar province was at that time under the responsibility of the 217th ANA corps. ANA's 20th Division, previously under the ANA 209th Corps, was reassigned in April 2019 to become a new corps, the 217th Corps.³⁷⁴² Takhar province remains included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC–North), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan.³⁷⁴³

ALP, local uprising forces and pro-government militias were present and active in some of Takhar's districts.³⁷⁴⁴ The ALP unit in Takhar is cited as a negative case study; according to a July 2020 AAN report, 'Takhar has long been a key transit point for smuggling and had a history of problematic commander politics', which meant that 'local powerbrokers in Takhar easily co-opted the ALP, using it as a vehicle to legitimize and fund their militias and security rackets'. Moreover, 'the ALP in Takhar functioned as little more than predatory "drug-runners"' according to a source quoted in the report.³⁷⁴⁵ A subsequent report of October 2020 presented a somewhat more balanced view of the Takhar ALP, where it was argued that 'of the four districts with ALP units in Takhar, three are still problematic [...] smuggling alcohol, drug and weapons'. Nevertheless, according to a source quoted in the report, the presence of the ALP in Takhar was 'useful, relatively speaking', as it helped 'the morale of other government forces', while the unit in Eshkamesh had 'improved in terms of principles and discipline' and was 'entirely involved in the defence of the district'.³⁷⁴⁶ Funding for the ALP has stopped on 30 September 2020, and the force was to be disbanded within three months, while its members were expected either to be disarmed and retired, or transferred to the ANP and ANA Territorial Force (ANA-TF).³⁷⁴⁷ A 2021 AAN report quoted a 'former ALP commander', who claimed that a majority of the former ALP members had joined the ANP, while the rest had been

³⁷³⁷ National (The), ISIS recruitment is growing in Afghanistan as US and Taliban work for peace, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁷³⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Takhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁷³⁹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey, 3 May 2021, [url](#), p. 9; UNODC, Afghanistan opium survey 2019, 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 12

³⁷⁴⁰ UNODC, "Voices of the Quchaqbar" – Understanding opiate trafficking in Afghanistan from the perspective of drug traffickers, January 2020, [url](#), p. 17; Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, In The Dark: Tajik Border Residents Live Not Knowing What Lies Beyond, 22 November 2018, [url](#); Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁷⁴¹ UN Security Council, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 49

³⁷⁴² SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 78

³⁷⁴³ NATO, Resolute Support: Train Advise Assist Command – North, accessed 22 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁴⁴ Khaama Press, Taliban's ambush in Takhar kills 20 members of public uprising forces, 29 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 pro-government militiamen killed in Takhar assault, 29 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Takhar: 2 uprising members killed in Taliban attack, 15 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁴⁵ Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilization in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN and GPPI, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁴⁶ Clark, K., Disbanding the ALP: A dangerous final chapter for a force with a chequered history, AAN, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁴⁷ Clark, K., Disbanding the ALP: A dangerous final chapter for a force with a chequered history, AAN, 6 October 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Plans to disband local police sparks worries, 3 October 2020, [url](#)

dismissed, with the effect that ‘the Taliban had taken over ALP posts left vacant’. At the same time, the report quoted a police spokesperson who stated that all former ALP members had joined the ANP, and were ‘operating in their old areas and from their checkpoints as they had the past’.³⁷⁴⁸

According to Afghanistan analyst Kate Clark in November 2019, the ANA-TF was established in Taloqan City and was also planned for Khwajabahawuddin district.³⁷⁴⁹ An October 2020 report by AAN quoted the ALP commander in Dasht-e Qala who stated that his unit had ‘rejected an offer to integrate ALP into the ANA-TF’, as it was a ‘failed project in Takhar province’, due to the ANA-TF lacking ‘timely support and supplies’ from the Ministry of Defense.³⁷⁵⁰ More recently, a 2021 AAN report stated that ‘in no district did ALP want to join the ANA-TF’ in Takhar.³⁷⁵¹

2.32.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 240 civilian casualties (88 killed, 152 injured) in Takhar province, a 25 % increase compared to 2019, when 192 civilian casualties (60 killed and 132 injured) were recorded. In 2020, the leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by airstrikes and targeted killings, whereas in 2019, the leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by airstrikes and non-suicide IEDs.³⁷⁵²

Between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data on 153 violent events in Takhar province, of which 107 were coded as battles, 29 were coded as explosions/remote violence, and 17 were coded as violence against civilians.³⁷⁵³

³⁷⁴⁸ AAN, Disbanding the ALP – An Update: Major transition of security forces achieved during wartime, but at a cost, 15 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁴⁹ Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁷⁵⁰ Clark, K, Disbanding the ALP: A dangerous final chapter for a force with a chequered history, AAN, 6 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁵¹ AAN, Disbanding the ALP – An Update: Major transition of security forces achieved during wartime, but at a cost, 15 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁵² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, February 2021, [url](#), pp. 11, 110; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, February 2020, [url](#), pp. 5, 94

³⁷⁵³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Takhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)



Figure 62: Takhar province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³⁷⁵⁴

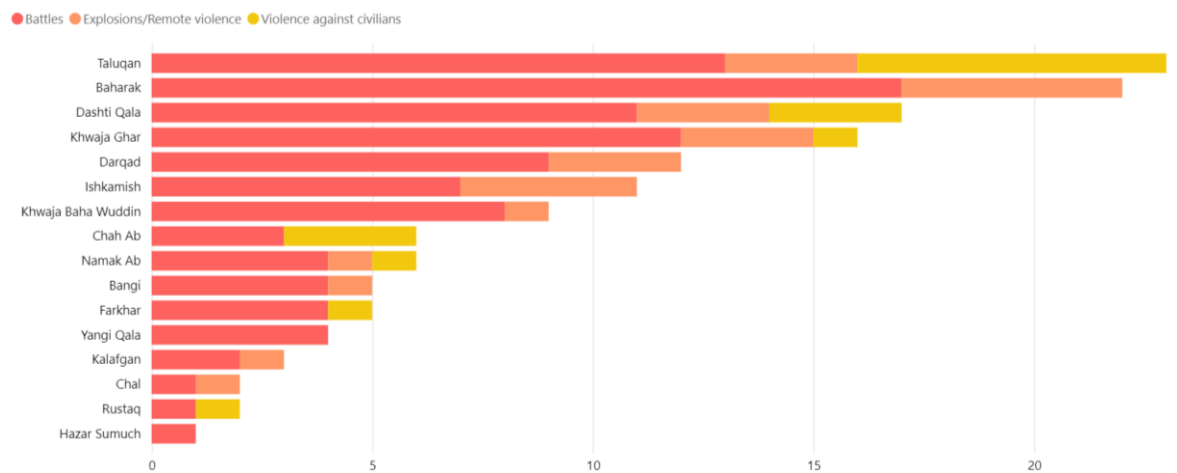


Figure 63: Kunduz province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³⁷⁵⁵

Of the 107 battles, around 93 % of incidents involved armed clashes, while the remaining 7 % recorded change in control over territory or positions. The majority of those armed clashes (some 80 %) were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police or military personnel, and members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis*³⁷⁵⁶ (the term *arbaki* is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias³⁷⁵⁷), or on NATO troops.³⁷⁵⁸ Taliban attacks against Afghan forces occurred throughout the reference period, with many attacks carried out as ‘late night assaults’,³⁷⁵⁹ and

³⁷⁵⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Takhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁵⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Takhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 9 incidents (6 battles and 3 remote violence) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

³⁷⁵⁶ ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Takhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁵⁷ AAN, Enemy Number One: How the Taleban deal with the ALP and uprising groups, 19 July 2018, [url](#); HRW, “Just Don’t Call It a Militia” Impunity, Militias, and the “Afghan Local Police”, 4 September 2011, [url](#), p. 13

³⁷⁵⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Takhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁵⁹ AA, Afghanistan: Over 30 policemen dead in Taliban attacks, 21 October 2020, [url](#)

resulting in numerous deaths among the security forces.³⁷⁶⁰ Moreover, episodes of fighting such as those in Nahr-e Ab area of Farkhar³⁷⁶¹, Dasht-e Qala³⁷⁶², Taloqan³⁷⁶³ or Chal³⁷⁶⁴, led to the forced displacement of thousands of people in each case. Attacks initiated by the Taliban were launched on security checkpoints³⁷⁶⁵, army convoys³⁷⁶⁶, and residences of local officials³⁷⁶⁷, while fighting destroyed the houses of four families in Baharak district in May 2020.³⁷⁶⁸

With regards to change in control over territory or facilities, some of the incidents include: the Taliban took control of three check points in Khwajaghar district on 30 March 2020, and on 20 April 2020, the Hawa Shinasi military base in Khwajaghar district was captured by a Taliban Red Unit.³⁷⁶⁹ On 21 June 2020, the Taliban attacked Afghan security positions in Namakab district, and 'captured three security outposts'³⁷⁷⁰, while taking over parts of the Khwajabahawuddin district on 13 September 2020.³⁷⁷¹

There were 29 incidents of explosions/remote violence recorded by ACLED during the reference period in Takhar. Most of them were attributed to either the Afghanistan security forces (some 18 incidents), to the Taliban (5) or to unidentified armed groups (5), and to NATO forces (1). The most incidents of explosions/remote violence took place in Taloqan (6 incidents), followed by Baharak (5), Eshkamesh (4), and Dasht-e Qala, Khwajaghar and Darqad (3 each).³⁷⁷² Civilian fatalities were recorded in several incidents, such as on 21 October 2020, when 12 children were killed and others were injured by an airstrike on Taloqan city³⁷⁷³, while during 15 – 21 February 2021 two civilians were killed, and five others were injured by mortar fire on a 'residential area in Dasht-e-Qala district'.³⁷⁷⁴

With regards to violence against civilians, of the 17 incidents recorded in Takhar during the reference period, 9 were attributed to the Taliban, 5 to unidentified armed groups, and 3 to Afghanistan security forces.³⁷⁷⁵ On 30 March 2020, one civilian was killed in a Taliban attack on Khwajaghar district police chief's home.³⁷⁷⁶ On 21 April 2020, a woman was reportedly killed at an illegal checkpoint in the Qulbers area, Taloqan city.³⁷⁷⁷ On 7 July 2020, three local government employees were killed by a member of the Taliban in Aqlimamai village, Khwajaghar district.³⁷⁷⁸ On 15 September 2020, 'bomb blast killed two civilians and injured a dozen more in Kalfagan district'.³⁷⁷⁹

³⁷⁶⁰ VOA, Taliban Attacks Kill 21 Afghan Forces, 30 March 2020, [url](#); Garda World, Afghanistan: Security forces killed in Taliban attack in Takhar province on September 20, 21 September 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Afghan security forces killed in clashes in Takhar province, 20 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁶¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (31 August – 6 September 2020), 6 September 2020, [url](#), p. 1

³⁷⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 – 27 September 2020), 30 September 2020, [url](#), p. 1

³⁷⁶³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 – 11 October 2020), 14 October 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (26 October – 1 November 2020), 1 November 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷⁶⁵ Xinhua, Taliban attack on Afghan district repulsed, 12 killed, 28 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁶⁶ Xinhua, 4 soldiers, 5 militants killed in N. Afghanistan's fighting, 14 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁶⁷ Xinhua, 19 killed in Taliban attacks in 2 Afghan provinces, 30 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 May – 10 May 2020), 13 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁶⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁷⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁷¹ Afghanistan Times, Taliban overrun a district in Takhar, 13 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁷² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Takhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁷³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (19 – 25 October 2020), 28 October 2020, [url](#), p. 2; VOAnews, Airstrike Kills 12 Children in Northeastern Afghanistan, 22 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (15 – 21 February 2021), 24 February 2021, [url](#), p.2

³⁷⁷⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Takhar province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁷⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban raid leaves 14 security forces dead in Takhar, 30 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁷⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 April – 26 April 2020), 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 1

³⁷⁷⁸ Afghanistan Times, Freed Taliban prisoner kills govt. employees in Takhar, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁷⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 civilians killed, 12 wounded in Takhar blast, 16 September 2020, [url](#)

Between 16 and 22 November 2020, ongoing fighting led to unspecified civilian casualties in Rostaq and Chahab districts.³⁷⁸⁰ On 25 November 2020, three civilians were shot and killed by unknown persons in Shingan village, Farkhar district.³⁷⁸¹ During 30 November – 6 December 2020, ‘two women were reportedly wounded and one person was abducted by unknown gunmen in Baharak district’.³⁷⁸² On 21 January 2021, a civilian was killed in Baharak district.³⁷⁸³ In February 2021, civilians were ‘reportedly killed in Takhar province as a result of the illegal checkpoints’.³⁷⁸⁴

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020–28 February 2021, reporting 34 937 persons displaced from Takhar, of which 34 811 (some 99 %) were displaced within the province, while 126 persons were displaced to Faryab, Kabul, Nangarhar and Parwan provinces. During the same period, no displacement was reported to Takhar from other provinces.³⁷⁸⁵ At the same time, an IOM report stated that between January–June 2020, at least 15 101 people were displaced from Takhar province.³⁷⁸⁶

By district of origin in Takhar, higher levels of displacement during the reference period were recorded in Taloqan (31.9 %), Baharak (20.1 %), and Farkhar (17.7 %). Smaller levels of displacement were recorded in Khwajabahawuddin, Khwajaghar, Namakab, Dasht-e-Qala, Chal, Chahab, Kalafgan and Yangi Qala.³⁷⁸⁷

Some of the indicative displacement events include: between 7 and 10 April 2020, some 1 400 people were displaced by fighting in Taloqan city and Baharak district.³⁷⁸⁸ Between 8 and 14 June 2020, ‘fighting in Farkhar, Eshkamesh and Khwajabahawuddin districts’ displaced around 700 people to Taloqan city.³⁷⁸⁹ During 6 – 12 July 2020, around 3 094 people were displaced ‘from remote villages towards Taloqan city’.³⁷⁹⁰ Between 31 August and 6 September 2020, some 3 500 people were displaced from Nahr-e Ab area of Farkhar district to Taloqan city.³⁷⁹¹ Between 5 and 11 October 2020, some 2 450 people were displaced ‘In the Qulbers and Abdal areas of Taloqan city’.³⁷⁹² During 26 October – 1 November 2020, around 2 100 people were displaced in Chal district.³⁷⁹³ Between 30 November and 6 December 2020, approximately 1 750 people were displaced by conflict across the province.³⁷⁹⁴

³⁷⁸⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 – 22 November 2020), 25 November 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷⁸¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 – 29 November 2020), 3 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2; Ariana News, Three witnesses gunned down in Takhar after court appearance, 26 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁸² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 November – 6 December 2020), 10 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷⁸³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 – 24 January 2021), 27 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷⁸⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (8 – 14 February 2021), 14 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷⁸⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁸⁶ IOM, DTM Afghanistan: Baseline Mobility Assessment - Takhar Summary Results, Round 10 - Jan – Jun 2020, 7 April 2021, [url](#), p. 8

³⁷⁸⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2021, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, updated 22 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁷⁸⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 April – 12 April 2020), 12 April 2020, [url](#), p. 1

³⁷⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (8 June– 14 June 2020), 14 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1

³⁷⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 July – 12 July 2020), 12 July 2020, [url](#), p. 1

³⁷⁹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (31 August – 6 September 2020), 6 September 2020, [url](#), p. 1

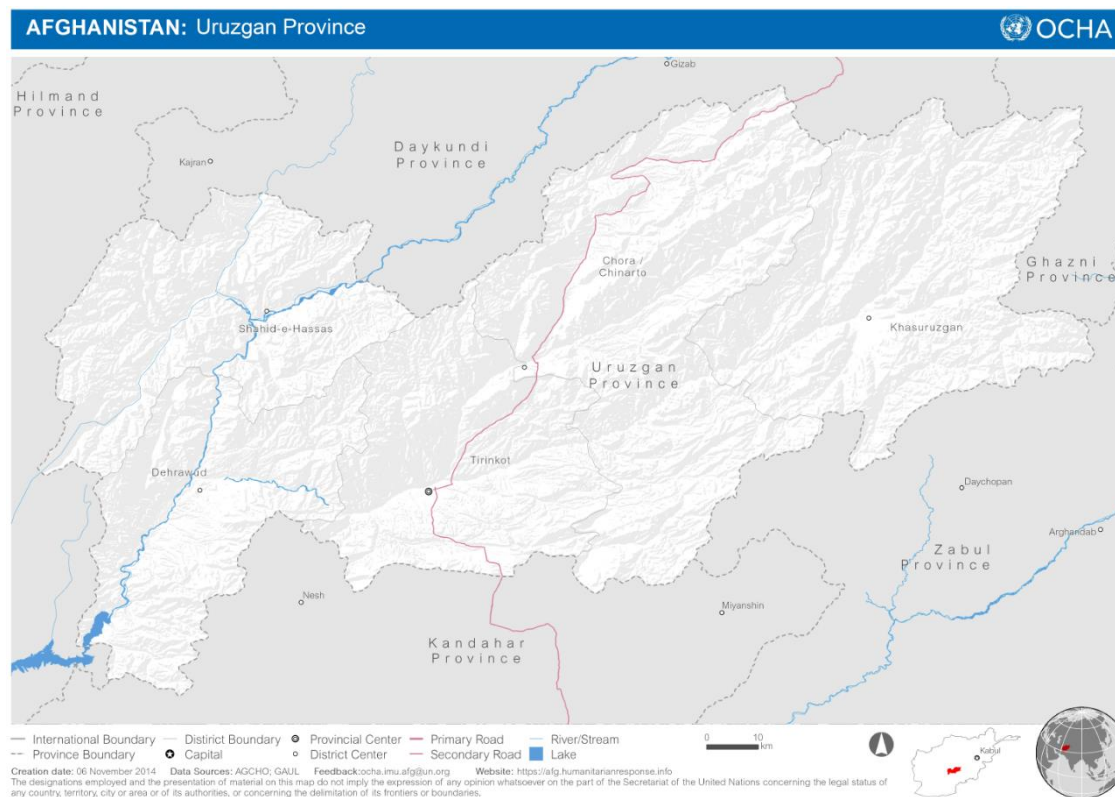
³⁷⁹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 – 11 October 2020), 11 October 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷⁹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (26 October – 1 November 2020), 1 November 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁷⁹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 November – 6 December 2020), 6 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

2.33 Uruzgan

2.33.1 General description of the province



Map 33: Afghanistan – Uruzgan province, source: UNOCHA³⁷⁹⁵

Uruzgan province is located in the central part of Afghanistan and is also known by the name 'Rozgan' or 'Uruzganis'.³⁷⁹⁶ Uruzgan is divided into the following administrative units: Tirinkot with the provincial capital Tirinkot City (also known as Tarinkot), Dehraoud, Chora, Shahidhassas (also Shahid-e Hassas, Charchino) and Khas Urozgan, Gizab, Chinarto (temporary district).³⁷⁹⁷

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, Uruzgan has a population of 428 466 with 114 306 of its residents living in the provincial capital of Tirinkot City. Urban population constitutes about 3.7 % of all inhabitants of the province.³⁷⁹⁸ Nearly all the population of the province is agrarian and Uruzgan is one of the least developed provinces in terms of education, health facilities and infrastructure.³⁷⁹⁹

The population is composed mainly of Pashtuns belonging to Durrani tribe and its sub-tribes (Nurzai, Barakzai, Popalzai, Achakzai, Alikozai) and Ghilzai tribe (Hotak sub-tribe). There are also Hazaras who settled down mainly in Tirinkot city³⁸⁰⁰ and in Gizab and Khas Urozgan district.³⁸⁰¹ Some nomad Kuchi tribes also travel through the province but their number depends on the season.³⁸⁰²

³⁷⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 32

³⁷⁹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Brief introduction of Uruzgan province, n.d., [url](#)

³⁷⁹⁷ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 35

³⁷⁹⁸ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 31

³⁷⁹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Brief introduction of Uruzgan province, n.d., [url](#)

³⁸⁰⁰ US Naval Postgraduate School, Zabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Kohistani, Urozgan Province, 2016, [url](#)

³⁸⁰¹ TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), p. 15

³⁸⁰² US Naval Postgraduate School, Zabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Kohistani, Urozgan Province, 2016, [url](#)

The Kandahar-Daikundi Highway runs through Uruzgan province, crossing the districts of Chora and Tirinkot.³⁸⁰³ Taliban militants purportedly set up check-points along the highway and they searched abducted, or even killed travellers.³⁸⁰⁴ Moreover, passengers complained about the 'shabby condition' of the road, which extended the travel time and had a negative impact on vehicles and security.³⁸⁰⁵ Military operations were ongoing in February 2019, in order to clear the road from Taliban insurgents.³⁸⁰⁶ The city of Tirinkot hosts an airport, which was served by domestic scheduled passenger flights.³⁸⁰⁷

2.33.2 Conflict background and actors in Uruzgan

Uruzgan was one of the first provinces affected by Taliban resurgence after 2001. Martine van Bijlert, an expert on Afghanistan who has researched the dynamics of the conflict in Uruzgan and Zabul, identifies several factors which contributed to the spread of Taliban influence in this region: 'tribal targeting and marginalization, human rights abuses and other forms of oppression, weakness or absence of government, local conflicts, tribal and other links to prominent Taliban leaders, local competition on resources and history of insurgency in the region'.³⁸⁰⁸

According to Bijlert, from 2002 to 2006, Jan Mohammad, a strongman known in the pre-Taliban era for his brutality, was nominated as the governor of the province. He was also accused of killing, detaining or humiliating his private rivals. His private enemies included a wide range of local leaders, who previously had been connected to Taliban, but after American intervention they agreed to stop fighting. They sometimes were neutral or even pro-government leaders but they belonged to some less influential tribes. Soon, local leaders targeted by him, started organizing insurgency, using old tribal or religious networks.³⁸⁰⁹ In the beginning of the insurgency, the Taliban suffered from great losses caused by international air strikes so they quickly changed methods of fighting 'from large-scale attacks to asymmetrical warfare: ambushes, assassinations, small-scale attacks, IEDs, suicide bombings'.³⁸¹⁰ After 2006, the Australian and Dutch Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) were established in the province to prevent the counterinsurgency but also to focus on development, however the distribution of the assistance also triggered some local conflicts.³⁸¹¹

The attempts by the government to set up local militias to protect villages against the Taliban showed 'mixed results'. In Khas Urozgan district, local Hazaras took part in such initiatives which led to a conflict with the Pashtun population of this ethnically mixed district. Hazaras were accused of providing intelligence to the government. As a consequence, the targeting of this ethnic group increased. The Pashtun local leaders who tried to reach local peace agreements were also frequently killed by Taliban who did not trust them and regarded them as US collaborators.³⁸¹²

³⁸⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 32;

³⁸⁰⁴ Tolonews, Taliban Abducts 19 Bus Passengers and Police On Uruzgan Highway, 28 February 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Dilapidated Kandahar road gives passengers bumpy ride, 14 November 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Lecturer among 5 passengers killed on Uruzgan-Kandahar highway, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

³⁸⁰⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Dilapidated Kandahar road gives passengers bumpy ride, 14 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁸⁰⁶ Khaama Press, Militants suffer heavy casualties in ANDSF operations in Kandahar and Zabul, 7 February 2019, [url](#)

³⁸⁰⁷ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan, 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 12

³⁸⁰⁸ Bijlert M., 'The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan' in: Bergen, P. (ed.), Talibanistan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, p. 99

³⁸⁰⁹ Bijlert M., 'The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan' in: Bergen, P. (ed.), Talibanistan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp. 103, 105

³⁸¹⁰ Bijlert M., 'The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan' in: Bergen, P. (ed.), Talibanistan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, p. 116

³⁸¹¹ Bijlert M., 'The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan' in: Bergen, P. (ed.), Talibanistan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp. 103, 105

³⁸¹² Bijlert M., 'The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan' in: Bergen, P. (ed.), Talibanistan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp. 103, 105

After 2014, when most of the ISAF forces left Uruzgan, the Taliban managed to take control over most of the province. In September 2016, they entered the capital district and Tirinkot city. A lot of residents were forced to leave their homes and the Taliban used residential areas to fire on troops. The central administration and police moved to the military base at the airport. Finally, the airstrikes and the support from general Abdul Razeq from neighbouring Kandahar cleared the Taliban out of the city.³⁸¹³

In 2018, Taliban intensified their operations in the areas where mixed Pashtun and Hazara populations live, especially in Khas Urozgan district. This caused battles between the Hazara ALP leader, Hakim Shujai, his militiamen and the Taliban.³⁸¹⁴ The fighting highly influenced also Hazara districts in neighbouring Ghazni province.³⁸¹⁵

According to the TLO rapid assessment report on the province from 2020, which documents aspects of the situation there since the withdrawal of Dutch forces, the security situation in Uruzgan remains unstable. The Taliban stepped up attacks in Uruzgan since the signing of the Doha deal. All major roads in the province are controlled by the Taliban and ANSF is clashing with the Taliban in all districts.³⁸¹⁶

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Uruzgan province increased by 16 %.³⁸¹⁷

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Uruzgan province is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps, which falls under Train Advise Assist Command-South (TAAC-S), led by US forces.³⁸¹⁸ The ANA soldiers usually originate from the other provinces and they do not often leave military bases. In practice, their main task is not to defend local people but to avoid surrendering the base or checkpoints to Taliban.³⁸¹⁹ Soldiers have to protect military bases, sometimes without any outside reinforcement. The only effective option for maintaining the military posts, are air strikes.³⁸²⁰ ANSF supplies cannot reach military bases by roads as they are controlled by Taliban and the army can rely only on air delivery to maintain check-points at the district level.³⁸²¹ At the same time, army and police checkpoints, bases, and office buildings which represent the only government's presence and control in the countryside, are the main target of repeated Taliban attacks.³⁸²²

³⁸¹³ BBC News, Afghan forces battle Taliban in Uruzgan, 8 September 2016, [url](#); Al -Jazeera, Afghanistan: Taliban pushes into Uruzgan's Tarinkot, 8 September 2016, [url](#)

³⁸¹⁴ Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (I): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 28 November 2018, [url](#); Adili, A. Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Afghan Shi'ite militia battles Taliban, raising sectarian fears, 3 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁸¹⁵ Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (I): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 28 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁸¹⁶ TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), p. 3

³⁸¹⁷ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³⁸¹⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

³⁸¹⁹ Canberra Times (The), Lessons to be learnt from failures in Uruzgan 26 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁸²⁰ RFE/RL/Gandhara, In Remote Afghan Corner, Besieged Afghan Troops Cry For Help 06 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁸²¹ TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), p. 3

³⁸²² RFE/RL/Gandhara, In Remote Afghan Corner, Besieged Afghan Troops Cry For Help, 6 August 2019, [url](#)

The central authority is limited to the provincial capital, Tirinkot and AGEs took initiatives in the rest of the province.³⁸²³ The central administration is not present in most district centres and towns³⁸²⁴ and people felt let alone with no choice but to cooperate with Taliban.³⁸²⁵

In practice, police forces, ANP and especially on ALP have the responsibility to protect the local population against AGEs.³⁸²⁶ However, appointments for senior positions in the police often cause intra-tribal animosity and rivalry.³⁸²⁷ The top officials take the decision without any coordination and they are often busy with internal infighting. Corruption is widespread among police chiefs in the province. In one case, a former police chief was accused of stealing 58 000 litres of oil during four months which should have been used for police transport and generators.³⁸²⁸ In January 2020, the provincial police chief was dismissed for the extortion of bribes from his subordinates and for stealing money intended for employees' remuneration.³⁸²⁹

Locals assess that professionalism of ANA and NDS has increased in recent years but they still complain about ANP behaviour and civilian casualties. Policemen are often drug addicted and use 'indiscriminate force' during clashes with Taliban.³⁸³⁰

The Taliban insurgency in Uruzgan is based 'on religious networks' and have 'its roots in the Soviet resistance'. The existence of strong ties helped Taliban to create the new networks of insurgency quickly after 2001. Local command is supervised by the 'Queta Shura' based in Pakistan. As in other provinces, the Taliban established a shadow administration with provincial governor, district governors, military commanders, and court and taxation system. The administration is highly militarised. Only some Taliban judges had not been field commanders in the past.³⁸³¹

Currently, Taliban controls 80-90% of territory of the province and what is even more important – all major roads linking Uruzgan and Kandahar.³⁸³² A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021 designed 8.52% of Uruzgan territory and population under government control, 89.52% of territory and 89.52% of population under Taliban control and 1.95% territory and 1.96% population controlled by neither side. The entire district and its centre under Taliban control is: Dehraoud.³⁸³³ According to LWJ, only one Uruzgan district, Chora, is fully controlled by Taliban, others are contested. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Shahidhassas and Dehraoud districts shifted to the 'Taliban control', while Chora remained under 'Taliban control', and as well as Tirinkot, Gizab and Khas Uruzgan districts remained as 'contested'.³⁸³⁴ Bilal Sarwary cited Afghan officials and tribal elders reporting a surge in the number of Taliban fighters 'in and around' Tirinkot.³⁸³⁵ According to TLO report from November 2020, in the rest of the districts, where administration is appointed, the staff is present only in military base or simply it is removed to Tirinkot. However, according to TLO, government control is effective only in Tirinkot, in 'small

³⁸²³ Canberra Times (The), Lessons to be learnt from failures in Uruzgan, 26 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁸²⁴ TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), pp 7-8

³⁸²⁵ Arab News, Afghans turn to Taliban in forgotten province, 09 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁸²⁶ Canberra Times (The), Lessons to be learnt from failures in Uruzgan 26 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁸²⁷ TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), p. 5

³⁸²⁸ Arab News, Afghans turn to Taliban in forgotten province, 09 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁸²⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Uruzgan police chief sacked, summoned to Kabul, 17 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁸³⁰ TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), p. 13

³⁸³¹ Bijlert M., 'The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan' in: Bergen, P. (ed.), Talibanistan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp 99, 110

³⁸³² TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#)

³⁸³³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁸³⁴ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

³⁸³⁵ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 28 May 2021, [url](#)

pockets immediately surrounding the district centres in Khas Urozgan and Chora' and in ANA bases in some other districts.³⁸³⁶ Status of Chora district is therefore unclear.³⁸³⁷

2.33.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 182 civilian casualties (61 deaths and 121 injured) in Uruzgan province. This represents an increase of 26% compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by non-suicide IEDs and air strikes.³⁸³⁸

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED reported a total of 344 incidents related to security in Uruzgan province, of which 254 were classified as battles, 88 as remote violence, 2 as cases of violence against civilians.³⁸³⁹

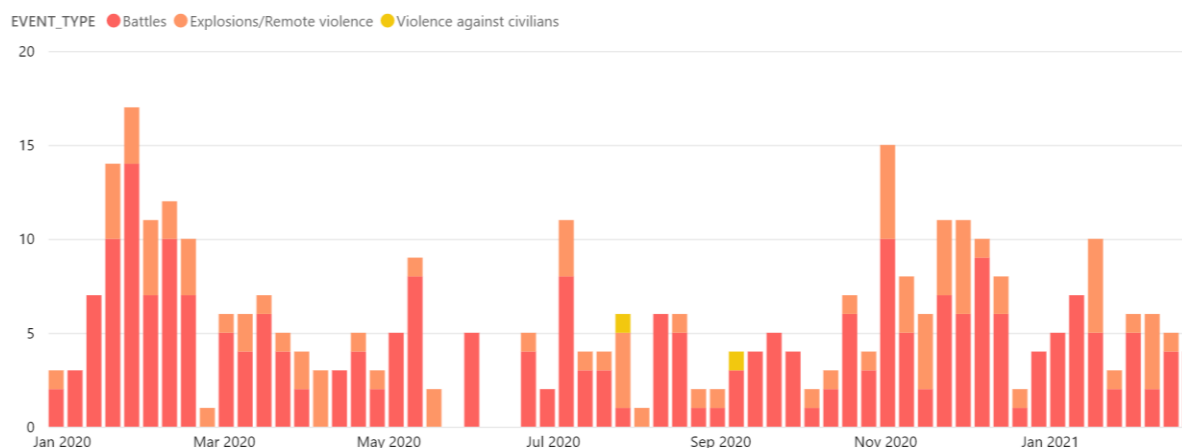


Figure 64: Uruzgan province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2020, based on ACLED data³⁸⁴⁰

³⁸³⁶ TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), pp. 9-10

³⁸³⁷ TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), pp. 9-10; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

³⁸³⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

³⁸³⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Uruzgan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁴⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Uruzgan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

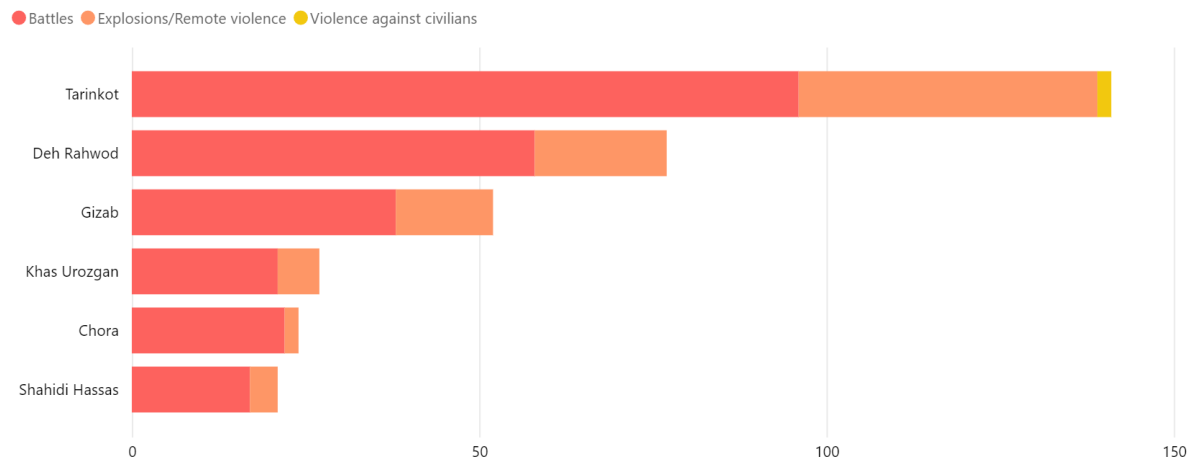


Figure 65: Uruzgan province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2020, based on ACLED data³⁸⁴¹

Taliban increased its attack during US-Taliban-talks and Taliban continued the same pressure and attacks when intra-Afghan talks began autumn 2020.³⁸⁴² According to TLO, reporting in 2020, clashes between security forces and AGEs took place in all districts. The most heavily affected were Chinarto, Gizab and Dehrawud. In autumn, when intra-Afghan peace talks were beginning, the Taliban increased its attacks and stormed the district centre of Gizab and Dehraoud.³⁸⁴³

In 2020, the Taliban was able to attack check-posts in provincial capital Tirinkot and to kill soldiers and other security personnel there. As an example of the level of Taliban control and contestation in Uruzgan beyond territorial presence, TLO cited the example that on 29 June 2020, the deputy director of NDS was killed at the central bus station in Tirinkot.³⁸⁴⁴

In 2020 UNAMA 'documented an increase in civilian casualties from ground engagements' in Uruzgan.³⁸⁴⁵ In September 2020, Gandhara reported about the death of civilians due to siege of Chinarto district. Up to 6 000 habitants were surrounded by the Taliban who had closed the only road to Tirinkot. Residents could not leave the area and they were deprived of food and medical services. According to Gandhara, quoting local people, at least 20 civilians, mostly women and children, died during the siege. Children and elderly suffered from 'diseases and hunger'.³⁸⁴⁶

On 17 October 2020, two women were killed and two children wounded by a mortar in Deh Rahwod district. Taliban was accused of launching the rocket.³⁸⁴⁷ On 23 January 2021 two civilians were killed and three wounded due to Taliban's rocket attack at the Tirinkot suburbs.³⁸⁴⁸

According UNAMA, the second cause of the civilian deaths were IED explosions.³⁸⁴⁹ On 18 July 2020, three civilians were killed when their vehicle was hit by a Taliban-planted IED in Tirinkot city.³⁸⁵⁰ On 1

³⁸⁴¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Uruzgan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 2 battles in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

³⁸⁴² TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), pp 9-10

³⁸⁴³ TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), p. 3

³⁸⁴⁴ TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), p. 10

³⁸⁴⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72

³⁸⁴⁶ RFE/RL/Ganghara, Taliban Siege Cuts Off Remote Afghan District, 11 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁴⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 women killed as mortar shell hits civilian house, 18 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁴⁸ Bakhtar News Agency, Civilians Martyred in a Taliban Rocket Attack, 24 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁴⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

³⁸⁵⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, [url](#)

August 2020, four civilians were killed when a bomb exploded in Tirinkot city.³⁸⁵¹ On 19 January 2021, two policemen were killed while five civilians were also wounded in an unidentified IED planted in a motorcycle hit a vehicle of the highway police in Tirinkot city.³⁸⁵²

There were also reports of clashes and air strikes in Uruzgan which caused civilian casualties³⁸⁵³ On 31 January 2020, one civilian was killed and two were wounded in Tirinkot city³⁸⁵⁴; on 4 April 2020 eight civilians were killed in Khas Urozgan³⁸⁵⁵; on 20 November 2020 six civilians were killed in Gizab district.³⁸⁵⁶ According to UNAMA, the house was targeted because Taliban fighters seized it to attack Afghan troops.³⁸⁵⁷

The Taliban controls all major roads inside the province. In some districts, locals did not have access to medical treatment, education and trade. Food supplies were highly limited and prices increased.³⁸⁵⁸ Moreover, on 26 November 2020, Afghan airstrikes destroyed shops and a clinic in Gizab district.³⁸⁵⁹ Access to education was limited in Tirinkot, Gizab and Khas Urozgan due to school closure. During 2020 Taliban opened some schools for boys in certain areas under their control.³⁸⁶⁰ Humanitarian activities were suspended both in Dehrawud and Gizab due to ongoing fighting.³⁸⁶¹

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 31 December 2020, reporting 20 049 persons displaced in Uruzgan province. They were displaced from different districts of the province such as Dehraoud, Chora / Chinarto, Khas Urozgan and Tirinkot. Most of them were resettled within the province and stayed in Dehraoud and Tirinkot districts. Some families, however, left Uruzgan for Kandahar City and Daikundi province. On the other hand, in October 2020, 415 people were resettled from Daikundi's Pato district to Tirinkot in Uruzgan.³⁸⁶²

TLO reports 'the large number of persons displaced from insecure or Taliban-controlled districts into the provincial centre' and 'regional hub of Kandahar city'. Most displaced people in Uruzgan move to Tirin Kot where the majority lived in rented houses or with family.³⁸⁶³

³⁸⁵¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 people killed in Uruzgan blasts, 1 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁵² Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 people wounded in Tirinkot blast, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁵³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Uruzgan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁵⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁵⁵ Voice of Jihad, 15 civilians martyred and wounded as a result of US and internal forces brutality in Zabul and Uruzgan, 05 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 – 29 November 2020), 3 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁵⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 67

³⁸⁵⁸ TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), p. 3

³⁸⁵⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Uruzgan province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁶⁰ TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), p. 3

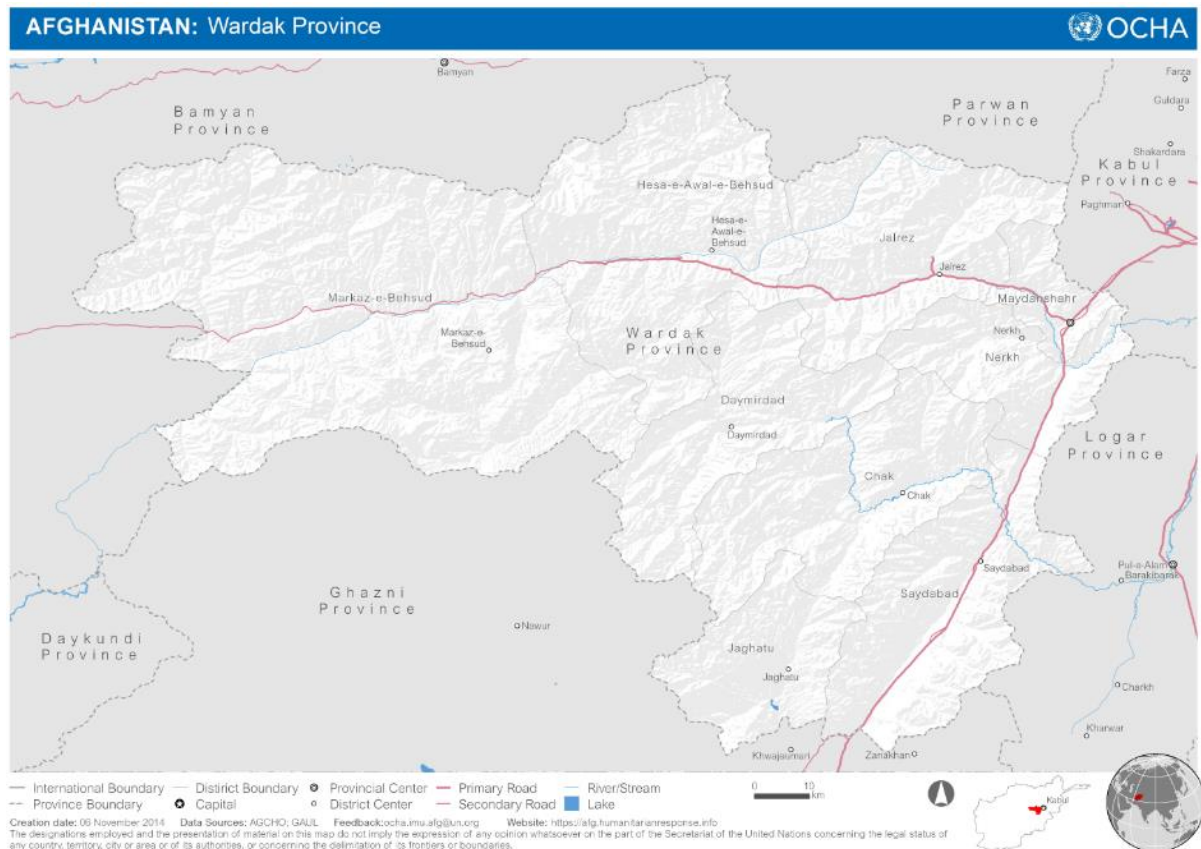
³⁸⁶¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Weekly Humanitarian Update, 2-8 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁶³ TLO, Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure, November 2020, [url](#), pp. 3, 9

2.34 Wardak province

2.34.1 General description of the province



Map 34: Afghanistan - Wardak province, source: UNOCHA³⁸⁶⁴

Wardak province, also known as Maydan Wardak, is located in the central region of Afghanistan and is divided into the following districts: Chak, Daymirdad, Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud, Jaghatu, Jalrez, Markaz-e Behsud (or Hesa-i Duwum-e Behsud), Maydan Shahr, Nerki and Saydabad. The provincial capital is Maydan Shahr, located approximately 40 kilometres south-west of Kabul.³⁸⁶⁵

According to estimates for 2019-20 by NSIA, Wardak province has a population of 648 866.³⁸⁶⁶

The main ethnic group in Wardak is Pashtun, followed by Hazara and Tajik enclaves.³⁸⁶⁷ The local Pashtun population belongs to a variety of Ghilzai tribes, primarily the Wardak, Kharoti and Hotak tribes.³⁸⁶⁸ The districts of Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud, Markaz-e Behsud and Daymirdad are predominantly inhabited by Hazara, as well as periodically visited by migrating Kuchi nomads.³⁸⁶⁹ Wardak province is inhabited by Sunni, as well as Shia Muslims.³⁸⁷⁰

³⁸⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial Reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 33

³⁸⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Wardak Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Taliban Blocks Major Afghan Highway in Expanding Attacks, 26 October 2016, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, November 2019, [url](#), p. 8

³⁸⁶⁶ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 8

³⁸⁶⁷ Arab News, In the Line of Fire: Wardak Residents Struggle to Stay Afloat in Afghanistan, 23 June 2019, [url](#); Adili, A. Y., Afghanistan's 2019 Elections (29): A Statistical Overview of the Preliminary Results, AAN, 8 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁶⁸ AREU, The Political Economy of Education and Health Service Delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016, [url](#), p. 33

³⁸⁶⁹ ACCORD, Query Response on Afghanistan: Wardak Province, Behsud District: Land Disputes, 6 August 2019, [url](#); Giustozzi, A., Nomad-Settler Conflict in Afghanistan Today, AREU, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 8, 19, 21

³⁸⁷⁰ US Naval Postgraduate School, Wardak Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

Wardak is described as a politically and strategically important province, due to its proximity to Kabul and its location on a crossroad of highways connecting the west and the east, as well as the north and the south of Afghanistan.³⁸⁷¹ The Kabul-Kandahar Highway passes through Wardak province, traversing the districts of Maydan Shahr, Nerkh and Saydabad. A provincial road runs west from Maydan Shahr to Bamyan province, through the districts of Jalrez, Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud and Markaz-e Behsud.³⁸⁷² The areas around the Kabul-Kandahar Highway are densely populated.³⁸⁷³ Wardak province has no functioning airport³⁸⁷⁴ and air traffic is regularly interrupted by bad weather conditions.³⁸⁷⁵

2.34.2 Conflict background and actors in Wardak

Despite its proximity to Kabul, Wardak province remained economically underdeveloped in the years after 2001, reportedly fuelling a sense of resentment among its residents. According to writer Shuhrat Nangyal from Wardak province, cited by the Intercept, ‘village clearance operations conducted by international troops further roiled the population’ and ‘by 2006 [...] Wardak was fertile for revolt’, creating opportunities for Taliban mobilisation.³⁸⁷⁶

In recent years, Wardak is described as an insecure area affected by ongoing armed conflict,³⁸⁷⁷ a heavily contested province³⁸⁷⁸ and ‘a hotbed of the insurgency’.³⁸⁷⁹ Intense fighting between militant groups and government forces has been reported in several parts of the province, with civilians often caught in the crossfire.³⁸⁸⁰

According to AAN analyst, Ehsan Qaane, Jalrez district’s geographically strategic position has made it prone for conflict and guerrilla activity for decades. The district’s importance is related to its proximity to Kabul, its location along the Kabul-Bamyan Highway and its many side roads and mountain paths leading to various districts in Wardak, Parwan and Kabul provinces. Several of those reportedly served as ‘supply and escape routes’, providing safe havens to militant groups and impeding the movement of government forces.³⁸⁸¹

The Taliban reportedly re-emerged and gained influence in Wardak province from 2006-2007, amid power struggles among rival militias. By 2009, the militant group controlled much of the Pashtun-dominated southern and eastern districts of the province. Some districts, such as Chak and Saydabad, have reportedly gone back and forth between Taliban and government control since

³⁸⁷¹ Goodhand, J. and Hakimi, A., Counterinsurgency, Local Militias and State Building in Afghanistan, USIP, January 2014, [url](#), pp. 17-18; Arab News, In the Line of Fire: Wardak Residents Struggle to Stay Afloat, 23 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁸⁷² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Wardak Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³⁸⁷³ Goodhand, J., Hakimi, A., Counterinsurgency, Local Militias and State Building in Afghanistan, USIP, January 2014, [url](#), p. 17

³⁸⁷⁴ Falling Rain, Directory of Airports in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); MSF, Afghanistan: Country Kit, 12 January 2016, [url](#); Afghanistan, ACAA, All Airports, 24 September 2017, [url](#)

³⁸⁷⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 11

³⁸⁷⁶ Intercept (The), The CIA’s Afghan Dead Squads - A US Backed Militia that Kills Children May Be America’s Exit Strategy from Its Longest War, 18 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁷⁷ Warden, S., Past as Prologue? What the Parliamentary Election Results Tell Us About the September Presidential Election, AAN, 23 August 2019, [url](#); PBS, What Life is Like for Afghans under Taliban Control, 31 December 2019, [url](#); IOM, DTM Afghanistan, Community Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results Round 10 Jan-June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 1

³⁸⁷⁸ Washington Post (The), As Afghanistan Struggles to Start Peace Talks, Violence Fills the Void, 10 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁷⁹ Christian Science Monitor (The), Inside the Taliban: What These Jihadis Say about Long-Sought Peace, 28 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁸⁰ International Crisis Group, Intensifying Violence Dulls Afghans’ Hopes for Peace, 5 July 2019, [url](#); Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#); PBS, What Life is Like for Afghans under Taliban Control, 31 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁸⁸¹ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

then.³⁸⁸² Jalrez district was among the first places where the Taliban started to reorganise their fighters. Since 2006, the district has been contested, with an increased Taliban activity reported from 2014 onwards.³⁸⁸³

According to sources reporting in 2020 and 2021, the Taliban's presence in Wardak is 'discreet but pervasive',³⁸⁸⁴ the militants have been strengthening their influence and control³⁸⁸⁵ and enjoy widespread support in the province.³⁸⁸⁶

In May 2020, the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team reported to the UN Security Council on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made, including in Wardak province. According to the same report, the Taliban have ordered increased supplies of ammunition and explosive materials, including for their forces in Wardak province.³⁸⁸⁷ According to a HRW study published in June 2020, 'Wardak's Vice and Virtue police are less visible than in Helmand and Kunduz and implementation of restrictions is more uneven, possibly because the Taliban's control over the province is less secure'. In Wardak the Taliban's vice and virtue policing reportedly includes people being questioned, beaten and detained for offenses against the Taliban's rules. The Taliban in Wardak are reported to have established a regulated system to collect taxes.³⁸⁸⁸ A senior Taliban commander, cited by AAN in October 2020, indicated an increased activity of the militants' recruitment commission in Wardak. According to a provincial council member, the Taliban in Wardak are 'capitalising on the growing distance between the government and Wardaki's'.³⁸⁸⁹

According to sources, Wardak's provincial capital Maydan Shahr is under direct Taliban threat,³⁸⁹⁰ with the government's control ending just two miles from the governor's residence.³⁸⁹¹ In Wardak's southern districts, the government's presence is described as 'limited to a handful of besieged buildings', with several of the district governors living in exile in Kabul, only visiting their precincts sporadically. In a December 2020 article by the Intercept, the Taliban's presence in Wardak province is described as 'inconspicuous', with the militant's interactions with local residents reportedly limited to requests for food and accommodation.³⁸⁹²

³⁸⁸² Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#); HRW, "You Have No Right to Complain": Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 31-32

³⁸⁸³ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁸⁸⁴ Intercept (The), The CIA's Afghan Dead Squads - A US Backed Militia that Kills Children May Be America's Exit Strategy from Its Longest War, 18 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁸⁵ An Afghan analyst Lifos spoke to in January 2020. Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 52; Tolonews, Maidan Wardak Faces Imminent Threat as Taliban Expands Presence, 26 June 2020, [url](#); Washington Post (The), As Afghanistan Struggles to Start Peace Talks, Violence Fills the Void, 10 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁸⁶ New York Times (The), An Afghan Mayor Expected to Die. Instead, She Lost Her Father, 6 November 2020, updated 12 November 2020, [url](#); Rolling Stone Magazine, Highway to Hell: A Trip Down Afghanistan's Deadliest Road, 22 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁸⁷ UN SECURITY COUNCIL, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9

³⁸⁸⁸ HRW, "You Have No Right to Complain": Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 48-52

³⁸⁸⁹ Quilty, A., Taleban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan Conflict Has Changed since the Doha Agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁹⁰ Rolling Stone Magazine, Highway to Hell: A Trip Down Afghanistan's Deadliest Road, 22 January 2021, [url](#); LWJ, Afghan Security Forces Withdrawing from Checkpoints, Bases, 4 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁹¹ Washington Post (The), As Afghanistan Struggles to Start Peace Talks, Violence Fills the Void, 10 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁹² Intercept (The), The CIA's Afghan Dead Squads - A US Backed Militia that Kills Children May Be America's Exit Strategy from Its Longest War, 18 December 2020, [url](#)

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 12 March 2021, indicated Saydabad district as ‘Taliban-controlled’ and Daymirdad, Chak, Jaghatu, Nerkh, Maydan Shahr and Jalrez districts as ‘contested’. LWJ designated Saydabad district as ‘contested’ and Maydan Shahr district as ‘government-influenced’. Markaz-e Behsud and Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud districts were categorised as ‘government-controlled’ or ‘undetermined’ in this assessment. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Nerkh, Maydan and Deymirdad districts shifted under the ‘Taliban control’.³⁸⁹³ According to Bilal Sarwary, following the besieged of Narkh district building by the Taliban for the past few days and continued fighting,³⁸⁹⁴ on 11 May 2021, the Taliban captured Narkh district (located 7 km from the provincial capital). Reportedly, chief of police and 30 ANDSF personal surrendered to the Taliban,³⁸⁹⁵ On 18 May 2021, in a video footage [a recently abandoned] ANDSF base was pillaged in Sayed Abad district.³⁸⁹⁶ On 22 May 2021, the Taliban reportedly have captured Jalrez district,³⁸⁹⁷ where NDS commander, along with 60 fighters, surrendered to the Taliban.³⁸⁹⁸

A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021³⁸⁹⁹ designated 23.89 % of Wardak’s territory under government control, 70.81 % under Taliban control (with the entire district of Daymirdad and its centre reportedly under Taliban control) and 5.30 % controlled by neither side. According to the same survey, 157 728 of Wardak’s inhabitants live in areas under government control, 467 560 of the province’s population live in areas under Taliban control and 34 969 of Wardak’s residents live in areas controlled by neither side.³⁹⁰⁰

Media sources in 2020 and 2021 reported on a Taliban presence in the districts of Jalrez³⁹⁰¹ (where a local group of Shiite fighters reportedly joined the Taliban in November 2020),³⁹⁰² Saydabad³⁹⁰³ (Tangi Valley),³⁹⁰⁴ Chak³⁹⁰⁵ (Seebak Bazar),³⁹⁰⁶ Daymirdad³⁹⁰⁷ (Sher Toghi)³⁹⁰⁸ and Nerkh.³⁹⁰⁹ In January 2020, the Taliban deputy shadow intelligence chief for Jalrez district was arrested in an NDS Special Forces’ raid on hideouts of the militant group.³⁹¹⁰ In April 2020, the shadow governor for Wardak, known as

³⁸⁹³ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

³⁸⁹⁴ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 11 May 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁹⁵ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 11 May 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁹⁶ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 17 May 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁹⁷ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 20 May 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁹⁸ Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 20 May 2021, [url](#)

³⁸⁹⁹ Through telephonic interviews or by distributing questionnaires, Pajhwok Afghan News interviewed a total of 1 266 respondents for this survey, randomly selected across the country. Pajhwok acknowledges the complexity of this task and the possible inaccuracy of the provided information.

³⁹⁰⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban Make Exaggerated Claims of Territory They Control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁰¹ AAN, The ‘Reduction in Violence’ Week: What Did (Some of the) People Think?, 28 February 2020, [url](#); Clark, K., Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (2): Assessing the Conflict a Month after the US-Taliban Agreement, AAN, 8 April 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Maidan Wardak Faces Imminent Threat as Taliban Expands Presence, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁰² Ruttig, T., Before Today’s Deportation: On the Security Situation in Afghanistan, 12 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁰³ Clark, K., Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (2): Assessing the Conflict a Month after the US-Taliban Agreement, AAN, 8 April 2020, [url](#); HRW, “You Have No Right to Complain”: Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 31-36, 48-52; LWJ, Taliban Parades Forces in Logar Province, 7 October 2020, [url](#); Quilty, A., Taliban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan Conflict Has Changed since the Doha Agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁰⁴ LWJ, Analysis: Taliban is Caught in a Lie by Denying Al Qaeda’s Presence in Afghanistan, 17 June 2020, [url](#); Rolling Stone Magazine, Highway to Hell: A Trip Down Afghanistan’s Deadliest Road, 22 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁰⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghans Celebrate Partial Truce In Frontline Provinces, 24 February 2020, [url](#); HRW, “You Have No Right to Complain”: Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 31-36, 48-52

³⁹⁰⁶ RFE/RL/Gandhara, How Afghan Women Fare under Taliban Rule, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁰⁷ Intercept (The), The CIA’s Afghan Dead Squads - A US Backed Militia that Kills Children May Be America’s Exit Strategy from Its Longest War, 18 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁰⁸ Mekong Review, Back in Force, February 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁰⁹ Tolonews, Maidan Wardak Faces Imminent Threat as Taliban Expands Presence, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁹¹⁰ Xinhua, Afghan Intelligence Agency Captures 6 Taliban Militants Near Kabul, 27 January 2020, [url](#)

Wali Jan or Hamza, was killed in Saydabad district.³⁹¹¹ In the same month, the Taliban's shadow police district chief of Saydabad district, known as Qari Jawid or Mansoor and reportedly in charge of a group of 50 militants, was killed.³⁹¹² In June 2020, a key member of the Taliban's Red Unit, known as Qari Zalmai or Ansar, was killed in Jalrez district.³⁹¹³ In July 2020, Wardak's deputy shadow governor was killed in an operation in Nerkh district.³⁹¹⁴ In October 2020, a key Taliban commander known as Awal Khan, reportedly planning attacks in Paghman district of Kabul province, was killed.³⁹¹⁵ In February 2021, a Taliban intelligence chief, known as Karimullah Zarghawi, was killed in Jalrez district.³⁹¹⁶

The Haqqani Network reportedly expanded to Wardak province in the past and merged there with jihadist groups who were operating south of Kabul. In Wardak, the Haqqani Network has mainly provided indirect support in the form of funds, training and sanctuary, reportedly to co-opt local Islamist militant leaders governing areas close to Kabul.³⁹¹⁷

Mid-July 2016, UNAMA reported on groups claiming allegiance to ISKP as operational in Wardak.³⁹¹⁸ In 2017, a possible emergence of ISKP was reported in the Takana area in Jalrez district.³⁹¹⁹ No incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were registered in Wardak province between 1 January 2020 and 28 February 2021 by ACLED. ACLED did record six incidents in which Taliban and/or ISKP militants were wounded and/or killed during military operations and caused by airstrikes in the districts of Chak, Nerkh, Daymirdad and Maydan Shahr in January and February 2020.³⁹²⁰

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, Wardak province remained a poppy-free province.³⁹²¹

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Wardak was reported to be under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps. According to USDOD reporting from April 2021, Task Force Southeast from NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan, previously including Wardak province, is no longer active.³⁹²² NDS unit 01 is reported to operate in the central region, including in Wardak province. This paramilitary CIA-backed militia has been allegedly accused of human rights abuses, such as involvement in extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and the killing of civilians in raids on residential homes, health clinics, mosques and *madrasas*.³⁹²³ In a December 2020 in-depth article from the Intercept, government officials in Wardak declared to have fielded numerous complaints about unit 01, but at the same time credited the militia with preventing the Taliban from overrunning the provincial capital Maydan Shahr and mounting attacks in nearby

³⁹¹¹ Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Kill the Shadow Governor of Taliban for Wardak Province, 12 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁹¹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's District Police Chief Among 7 killed in Wardak Firefight, 5 April 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban Leader Killed in Wardak Province, 5 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁹¹³ Khaama Press, Key Taliban Red Unit Group Member Killed in Wardak Clash, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁹¹⁴ Khaama Press, Taliban's Deputy Shadow Governor among 7 Killed in Wardak Province, 28 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁹¹⁵ Khaama Press, Maidan Wardak: Key Taliban Commander Killed in a 'Joint Security' Operation, 10 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁹¹⁶ Reporterly, [Twitter], posted on: 22 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁹¹⁷ Stanford University, Mapping Militant Organizations: Haqqani Network, 8 November 2017, [url](#)

³⁹¹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016, [url](#), p. 73

³⁹¹⁹ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁹²⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹²¹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³⁹²² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

³⁹²³ HRW, "They've Shot Many Like This" Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Clark, K., CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitaries Accused of Grave Abuses: New Human Rights Watch Report, AAN, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Intercept (The), The CIA's Afghan Dead Squads - A US Backed Militia that Kills Children May Be America's Exit Strategy from Its Longest War, 18 December 2020, [url](#)

Kabul. According to a Taliban spokesperson, cited by the Intercept, the terrorising attacks of militias, like unit 01, have had a positive effect on recruitment for their forces in Wardak.³⁹²⁴

During spring and summer, migrations of Kuchi nomads have regularly resulted in violent clashes caused by land disputes in Wardak's predominantly Hazara districts of Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud, Markaz-e Behsud and Daymirdad.³⁹²⁵ According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, in the past the Taliban exploited local land disputes between ethnic Hazaras and Kuchis to gain the latter's support.³⁹²⁶ When tensions between Kuchi nomads and local Hazara residents intensified in 2015, a public uprising force, called the Resistance Front, was created by Hazara commander Abdul Ghani Alipur.³⁹²⁷ In November 2018, Alipur was arrested by the NDS on charges of human rights abuses and corruption. His militia group was accused of attacking security forces and of extorting, harassing and kidnapping Pashtun passengers on the highway between Maydan Shahr and Jalrez.³⁹²⁸ His supporters claimed that Alipur had been fighting the Taliban,³⁹²⁹ patrolling and ensuring the safety of Hazara travellers.³⁹³⁰ After violent Hazara protests broke out in several parts of the country, Alipur was released from NDS custody.³⁹³¹ In June 2020, dozens of road construction workers were reportedly abducted and abused by armed men from Alipur's militia,³⁹³² and the killing of more than a dozen people due to armed confrontations between local residents and Kuchi nomads was reported.³⁹³³ In September 2020, several security outposts in Markaz-e Behsud district were attacked by Alipur's militiamen, wounding two police officers, taking one security official hostage and confiscating a military Humvee and ammunition.³⁹³⁴ At the end of January 2021, several civilians were reportedly killed³⁹³⁵ when clashes broke out between government security forces and militiamen loyal to commander Alipur in the districts of Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud and Hesa-i Duwum-e Behsud.³⁹³⁶ The government ordered an investigation into the exact circumstances of the event.³⁹³⁷ According to reporting from the New York Times, 'the cause of fighting and who started the attack were unclear' - with reasons reportedly ranging from control over tribal migration routes, the theft of government armoured vehicles, to the appointment of new police chiefs.³⁹³⁸ According to findings from the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), unarmed civilians were 'directly' and 'indiscriminately' targeted by the security forces, when a protest following the clashes

³⁹²⁴ Intercept (The), The CIA's Afghan Dead Squads - A US Backed Militia that Kills Children May Be America's Exit Strategy from Its Longest War, 18 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁹²⁵ ACCORD, Query Response on Afghanistan: Wardak Province, Behsud District: Land Disputes, 6 August 2019, [url](#); Giustozzi, A., Nomad-Settler Conflict in Afghanistan Today, AREU, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 8, 19, 21; Tolonews, Govt Team Probes Prolonged Violent Feuding in Wardak, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁹²⁶ Foschini, F., The Kuchi-Hazara Conflict, Again, AAN, 27 May 2010, [url](#)

³⁹²⁷ Tolonews, Alipoor Says He Is 'Ready to Hand Over All Weapons', 27 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁹²⁸ Tolonews, NDS Chief Says Claims Against Alipoor Will Be Investigated, 27 November 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Alipoor Says He Is 'Ready to Hand Over All Weapons', 27 November 2018, [url](#); Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁹²⁹ Tolonews, Alipoor Supporters Protest for the Second Day in Kabul, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁹³⁰ Washington Post (The), Afghan Authorities Free Hazara Fighter Whose Arrest Ignited Street Clashes, 27 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁹³¹ RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader after Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁹³² Pajhwok Afghan News, Alipoor's Men Kidnap, Beat Road Workers in Wardak, 23 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁹³³ Tolonews, Team to Investigate Maidan Wardak Clashes, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁹³⁴ Ariana News, Commander 'Sword's' Men Allegedly behind ANDSF Checkpoints Attack, 6 September 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Alipoor's Men Abduct, Beat Policemen in Maidan Wardak, 6 September 2020, [url](#)

³⁹³⁵ Accounts of the incident were reportedly contradictory. RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Claims Car Bombing That Killed at Least 14 Afghan Troops, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁹³⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Claims Car Bombing That Killed at Least 14 Afghan Troops, 30 January 2021, [url](#); Tolonews, Clashes in Maidan Wardak Leave Nine Dead: Mol, 30 January 2021, [url](#); New York Times (The), U.S. Should Slow Withdrawal from Afghanistan, Bipartisan Panel Urges, 3 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁹³⁷ Kabul Now, Behsud Case to Be Investigated, 1 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁹³⁸ New York Times (The), At Least 9 Dead in Afghan Helicopter Crash, after Clashes with Local Militia, 18 March 2021, [url](#)

had turned violent.³⁹³⁹ Wardak's provincial police chief was suspended and referred to the Attorney General's Office (AGO).³⁹⁴⁰ Since this incident, government forces and Alipur's militia men have reportedly been engaged in a tense and sometimes violent standoff in the Behsud districts.³⁹⁴¹

2.34.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 145 civilian casualties (55 deaths and 90 injured) in Wardak province. This represents a decrease of 21 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by non-suicide IEDs and targeted killings.³⁹⁴² According to UNAMA, Wardak is one of 16 provinces that experienced an increase in civilian casualties from ground engagements in 2020 compared to 2019.³⁹⁴³ Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Wardak province in the first quarter of 2020³⁹⁴⁴ and between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020.³⁹⁴⁵ RS data on civilian casualties per province for the second half of 2020 were no longer available in the SIGAR quarterly reports.³⁹⁴⁶

In its June 2020 Crisiswatch overview, International Crisis Group mentioned Wardak in a group of provinces that witnessed unchanging or increasing levels of conflict.³⁹⁴⁷ In June and August 2020, the UN Secretary-General indicated Wardak as one out of four provinces where the highest amount of conflict activity and security incidents were recorded.³⁹⁴⁸ In its Hard-to-Reach Districts Map, published in February 2021, UNOCHA ranked Chak district 23th out of 100 districts countrywide, with a conflict intensity of 2.7 (on a scale of 1.0 to 4.0); Saydabad district 32th, with a conflict intensity of 3.5; Nerkh district 33th, with a conflict intensity of 2.8; and Jalrez district 80th, with a conflict intensity of 2.6.³⁹⁴⁹

In an October 2020 AAN dispatch, journalist Andrew Quilty described how the conflict pattern in Wardak province has changed since the signing of the Doha Agreement in February 2020. The cessation of night raids and airstrikes, that characterised the conflict in the province in 2018 and 2019, has brought calm to areas controlled by the Taliban. In Wardak's contested areas, the Taliban have mounted their attacks on Afghan security forces. Increasing violence on the fringes of the small areas under government control in Wardak has impacted the civilian population caught in the crossfire on the new frontlines. In contrast to an intense offensive in previous years, the government security forces have been quiet in 2020. The Taliban, taking their advantage of the ceased airstrikes and NDS raids, have stepped up their assaults on ANDSF checkpoints, increased their IED attacks and have exerted more control of the roads in Wardak.³⁹⁵⁰ According to USDOD, the Taliban periodically

³⁹³⁹ Reportedly, AIHRC Releases Findings on Behsud Protest, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁴⁰ Tolonews, Maidan Wardak Police Chief Suspended over Behsud Incident, 8 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁴¹ New York Times (The), At Least 9 Dead in Afghan Helicopter Crash, after Clashes with Local Militia, 18 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁴² UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

³⁹⁴³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72

³⁹⁴⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

³⁹⁴⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

³⁹⁴⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2020, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁴⁷ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch - Overview Afghanistan June 2020, June 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁴⁸ UN Security Council, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General, A/74/897-S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5; UN Security Council, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General, 18 August 2020, S/2020/809, [url](#), p. 5

³⁹⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Access Group (HAG), Hard-to-Reach Districts - 11 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 4-5

³⁹⁵⁰ Quilty, A., Taliban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan Conflict Has Changed since the Doha Agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#)

carried out and claimed responsibility for large attacks, including high-profile attacks, in Wardak province in the second half of 2020.³⁹⁵¹

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED collected data from reports in open sources on 270 incidents related to insurgents in Wardak province, of which 170 were coded as 'battles', 78 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 22 as 'violence against civilians'.³⁹⁵²

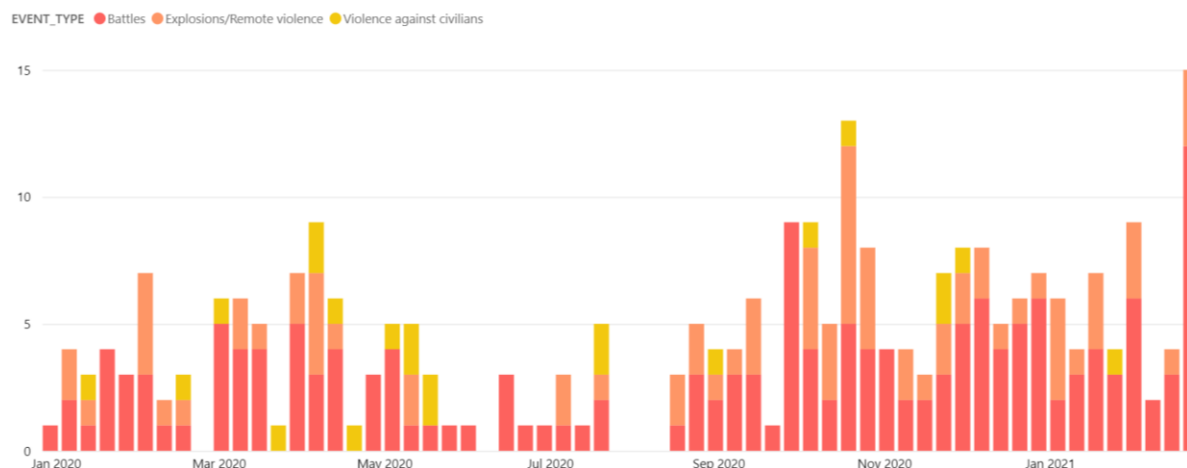


Figure 66: Wardak province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³⁹⁵³

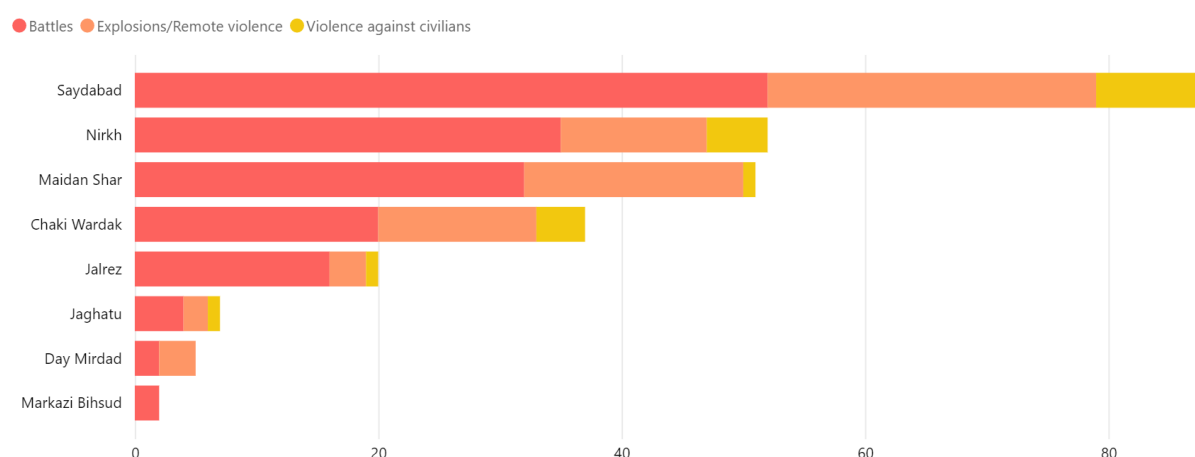


Figure 67: Wardak province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, based on ACLED data³⁹⁵⁴

ACLED recorded around 63 % of the violent incidents in Wardak as 'battles', nearly all of which were coded as 'armed clashes'. The majority of the 'armed clashes' in Wardak were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police and NDS personnel as well as members of pro-

³⁹⁵¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2020, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 8

³⁹⁵² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁵³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁵⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 8 incidents (7 battles and 1 violence against civilians) in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 - see introduction)

government militias or so-called *arbakis*³⁹⁵⁵.³⁹⁵⁶ Examples of such incidents included: assaults on security checkpoints in different areas near the provincial capital Maydan Shahr in May 2020³⁹⁵⁷ and in June 2020,³⁹⁵⁸ in Saydabad district in April 2020,³⁹⁵⁹ in May 2020³⁹⁶⁰ and in July 2020,³⁹⁶¹ in Nerkh district in April 2020³⁹⁶² and in May 2020,³⁹⁶³ and in Jalrez district in June 2020³⁹⁶⁴ and in February 2021,³⁹⁶⁵ as well as attacks/ambushes on security convoys/vehicles in Nerkh and Jalrez districts in March 2020,³⁹⁶⁶ in Saydabad district in July 2020,³⁹⁶⁷ in the Deh Afghanistan area of Maydan Shahr City in September 2020³⁹⁶⁸ and on Highway Two in Jalrez district in December 2020.³⁹⁶⁹ These incidents resulted in several casualties among the security forces. Information on civilian casualties reported during these incidents was not found among the sources consulted.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under ‘armed clashes’ by ACLED.³⁹⁷⁰ These incidents involved for example: various operations in January 2020 in Chak and Nerkh districts, killing and injuring several Taliban militants;³⁹⁷¹ operations in Jalrez district in January 2020, where Taliban encampments were raided and militants were killed, wounded and arrested³⁹⁷² and Special Forces’ search operations in the same district in December 2020;³⁹⁷³ and an operation in July 2020 in Nerkh district, preventing a Taliban attack on a security outpost.³⁹⁷⁴ Information on civilian casualties reported during these operations was not found among the sources consulted.

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeted the Afghan security forces.³⁹⁷⁵ These attacks represented about 15 % of all reported security incidents in Wardak. The majority of IED incidents were registered in Maydan Shahr district (where the provincial capital is located), followed by Chak, Saydabad and Nerkh districts.³⁹⁷⁶ Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. Late October 2020, at least ten civilians were killed and several others wounded when two passenger cars were hit by a roadside IED explosion on the highway between Maydan Shahr and Bamyān in

³⁹⁵⁵ For more information on *arbaki*: see section 1.2.1 Pro-government forces.

³⁹⁵⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁵⁷ Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Repulse Taliban Attack in Wardak Province: 203rd Thunder Corps, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁵⁸ Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on: 26 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁵⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s District Police Chief Among 7 killed in Wardak Firefight, 5 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁶⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 23 Taliban Killed in Maidan Wardak, Logar Clashes, 1 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁶¹ Tolonews, Car Bomb Hits Security Checkpoint in Maidan Wardak, 9 July 2020, [url](#); Reporterly, Car Bombs Hits Checkpoint In Wardak, 9 July 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Suicide Car Bomb Attack Hits Afghan Forces’ Check Post in Wardak, 9 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁶² Khaama Press, 6 Taliban Militants Killed, 4 Wounded in Wardak Operations: Thunder Corps, 20 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁶³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 23 Taliban Killed in Maidan Wardak, Logar Clashes, 1 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁶⁴ Khaama Press, Key Taliban Red Unit Group Member Killed in Wardak Clash, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁶⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2021, 4 February 2021, updated 25 February 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁶⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁶⁷ Xinhua, 3 Security Force Members, 21 Militants Killed in Afghan Daily Clashes, 3 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁶⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁶⁹ Khaama Press, Security Convoy Trapped in Taliban Ambush, 14 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁷⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁷¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁷² Xinhua, Afghan Intelligence Agency Captures 6 Taliban Militants Near Kabul, 27 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁷³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Car Bomb Hits Afghan Special Forces in Wardak, 31 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁷⁴ Khaama Press, Taliban’s Deputy Shadow Governor among 7 Killed in Wardak Province, 28 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁷⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, updated 26 March 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2020, 3 September 2020, updated 1 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, ANA Base in Wardak Comes under Bomb Attack, 15 October 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2020, 10 December 2020, updated 31 December 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Car Bomb Hits Afghan Special Forces in Wardak, 31 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁷⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

Jalrez district. There was no claim of responsibility for the attack, but government officials blamed the Taliban.³⁹⁷⁷ Also in October 2020, four civilians were killed when their car hit a roadside bomb in the Kotah-ye Ashro area of the provincial capital Maydan Shahr and another civilian was killed when a truck was blown up in a roadside bomb blast in Chak district. Local police officials blamed the Taliban for both attacks.³⁹⁷⁸ In the beginning of November 2020, one student (reportedly a former Hezb-e Islami commander) was killed and several others injured in an IED explosion at the entrance of a private university in Maydan Shahr. There was no claim of responsibility for the attack.³⁹⁷⁹ In late November 2020, two civilians were killed in a bomb explosion in Maydan Shahr City.³⁹⁸⁰

During the reference period, ACLED registered one suicide bomb attack in Wardak province.³⁹⁸¹ In July 2020, a suicide car bomb targeting an ANA convoy in Saydabad district killed eight soldiers and wounded several more. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.³⁹⁸²

Air/drone strikes represented about 7 % of all reported violent incidents in Wardak. Most air/drone strikes were carried out in Saydabad district, followed by Chak, Nerkh, Daymirdad and Maydan Shahr districts. The majority of these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces, two were attributed to NATO forces.³⁹⁸³ While these air/drone strikes mostly inflicted losses among AGEs,³⁹⁸⁴ destroying several Taliban hideouts and ammunition,³⁹⁸⁵ some also caused civilian casualties, such as: the killing of three university students in a US drone strike in Daymirdad district in February 2020, as reported by the Taliban;³⁹⁸⁶ and the killing of three civilians (alongside several Taliban militants) in a US forces' airstrike on a Taliban stronghold in Nerkh district in October 2020.³⁹⁸⁷

ACLED coded around 7 % of the violent incidents in Wardak as 'shelling, artillery and missile attacks'.³⁹⁸⁸ For example, in July 2020, the Taliban fired mortars on the district governor's office in Nerkh, killing a police officer.³⁹⁸⁹ The Taliban reported on several shelling and grenade attacks of their militants on the Afghan security forces in October 2020 and January 2021 in Saydabad and

³⁹⁷⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Civilians Killed in Maidan Wardak Blast: Official, 20 October 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 48-49

³⁹⁷⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁷⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan New, 1 Student Killed, 6 Injured in Blast outside Wardak University, 9 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁸⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2020, 5 November 2020, updated 26 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁸¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁸² RFE/RL/Gandhara, Suspected Taliban Attacks Kill over a Dozen Afghan Security Personnel, 20 July 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 8 Soldiers Killed in Maidan Wardak, 20 July 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Taliban Suicide Attack Kills Eight Afghan Troops, Wounds Nine, 21 July 2020, [url](#); Eurasia Review, Afghanistan: The Calculus of Violence - Analysis, 28 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁸³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁸⁴ Xinhua, Afghan Air Raids on Taliban Fighters Kill 3, Foil Design to Attack Checkpoints, 30 November 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban 'Battered' across Afghanistan, 'IEDs Defused', 10 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁸⁵ Khaama Press, 20 Taliban Militants Killed in Ghazni, Paktika and Wardak Provinces, 19 May 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Governor for Maidan Wardak Injured, 9 April 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, AAF Airstrike Hits Undetonated Car Bomb in Maidan Wardak, 11 January 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁸⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁸⁷ Although American forces denied the claim of civilian casualties caused by the airstrike. New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2020, 8 October 2020, updated 29 October 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Bombarded Taliban in Maidan Wardak: US forces, 26 October 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁸⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁸⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: July 2020, 9 July 2020, updated 30 July 2020, [url](#)

Nerkh districts.³⁹⁹⁰ Some of these shelling incidents resulted in civilian casualties, such as: the killing of a man and his two sons, when a mortar shell (fired by government forces according to local residents) hit their house in Saydabad district in July 2020;³⁹⁹¹ and the killing of several civilians in shelling and mortar attacks by the Afghan security forces in Saydabad district in April, May, August and September 2020 and in February 2021, as well as in Maydan Shahr district in April 2020 and in Nerkh district in October 2020, as reported by the Taliban.³⁹⁹²

ACLED categorised about 8 % of all reported violent incidents in Wardak as 'violence against civilians'.³⁹⁹³ These incidents involved for example: the abduction by the Taliban of dozens of civilians, reportedly professionally related to the Afghan government, from several villages in Chak district in March 2020;³⁹⁹⁴ the kidnapping and killing of a tribal elder by unknown perpetrators in Saydabad district in April 2020;³⁹⁹⁵ Taliban ambushes and killings of off-duty security personnel in Saydabad district in April 2020³⁹⁹⁶ and in Chak district in May 2020;³⁹⁹⁷ a Taliban shooting of a tribal elder and three of his family members in Chak district in June 2020 (however, the Taliban reportedly denied their involvement in the incident);³⁹⁹⁸ the killing of several civilians (one civilian was killed in each incident) by the Afghan security forces in Jaghatu and Nerkh districts in July 2020, in Saydabad district in October and December 2020, as well as in Nerkh district in January 2021, as reported by the Taliban;³⁹⁹⁹ and the abduction of around 28 civilian passengers by Taliban militants on the road in Jalrez district in November 2020.⁴⁰⁰⁰

The highways in Wardak province are described as insecure⁴⁰⁰¹ and 'under concentrated assault'.⁴⁰⁰² The stretch of Highway Two running through Jalrez district is described as 'one of the most unsafe routes for travellers in the central region'.⁴⁰⁰³ An increasing number of Afghans have reportedly been taking flights or longer routes to bypass roads situated in contested or Taliban-controlled areas.⁴⁰⁰⁴ Several sources reported on increased Taliban activity along Wardak's highways, for several years⁴⁰⁰⁵ and certainly since the reduced use of air power by US forces after the signing of the Doha Agreement in February 2020,⁴⁰⁰⁶ with the militants regularly detonating roadside bombs, mounting

³⁹⁹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁹¹ Tolonews, Afghanistan Violence: 9 Civilians Killed in Latest Incidents, 11 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁹² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁹³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

³⁹⁹⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Abduct 55 Civilians in Madian Wardak, 2 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (2 - 8 March 2020, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁹⁹⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kidnapped Tribal Elder Found Dead in Wardak, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Kill 3 Off-Duty Soldiers in Wardak, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Chak District Police Chief Killed in Taliban Attack, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁹⁸ Khaama Press, A Tribal Leader and Family Members Killed in Wardak, 7 June 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 'Taliban' Kill 4 Members of Family in Wardak: Officials, 7 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁹⁹⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰⁰ Ariana News, Taliban Kidnap Over Two Dozen Civilians in Wardak, 25 November 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, ICRC Employee Kidnapped in Maidan Wardak Following Abduction of 28 Locals, 29 November 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰¹ New York Times (The), Afghan Town's First Female Mayor Awaits Her Assassination, 4 October 2019, [url](#); Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 52; Afghanistan Times, Central Provinces Feared to Lose Security, 23 August 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰² Rolling Stone Magazine, Highway to Hell: A Trip Down Afghanistan's Deadliest Road, 22 January 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰³ Afghanistan Times, Central Provinces Feared to Lose Security, 23 August 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Security Convoy Trapped in Taliban Ambush, 14 December 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰⁴ Kazemi, S., R., Peace in the Districts (1): A Chasm between High Talks and Local Concerns in Afghanistan, AAN, 11 December 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰⁵ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 52

⁴⁰⁰⁶ Intercept (The), The CIA's Afghan Dead Squads - A US Backed Militia that Kills Children May Be America's Exit Strategy from Its Longest War, 18 December 2020, [url](#)

ambushes against military convoys, setting up checkpoints and searching vehicles for government employees.⁴⁰⁰⁷ The Afghan security forces have been reported as ‘scarcely visible on the road’, occupying a decreasing number of checkpoints.⁴⁰⁰⁸ Highway-side security checkpoints have come under greater pressure since mid-2020, with the Taliban reportedly attacking outposts within a kilometre of the governor’s office in Maydan Shahr. Government troops have reportedly abandoned many of their positions in October 2020, due to a lack of supplies and an increasing amount of Taliban roadside mines to diffuse every day.⁴⁰⁰⁹ According to an ANA commander of Wardak’s 5th Brigade, cited by Rolling Stone Magazine in January 2021, Taliban attacks on Highway One have increased since early 2020.⁴⁰¹⁰

Mid-2020, UNOCHA indicated the impact of the volatile security situation in Wardak on government resources and law enforcement in the province, contributing to rising criminality.⁴⁰¹¹ In June 2020, UNAMA expressed its concern on the scale of deliberate attacks on healthcare in Afghanistan at a time when the country has been confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic, documenting several Taliban abductions of healthcare workers in Wardak province between 11 March and 23 May 2020.⁴⁰¹² Concerning attacks related to health care provision in 2020, the WHO registered one health care facility affected (closed) in Saydabad district of Wardak province.⁴⁰¹³ In its Baseline Mobility Assessment, published in October 2020, IOM mentioned the destruction of a clinic in Maydan Shahr district during ongoing conflict.⁴⁰¹⁴

The Taliban reported on the shelling of a school by the Afghan military forces in Jaghatu district in August 2020 and on the destruction of two schools during a shelling attack of the Afghan military forces in Nerkh and Jalrez districts in November 2020.⁴⁰¹⁵ An ERM Protection Analysis Report with data from May to June 2020 reported on the kidnapping of children on their way to and from school in Wardak province, likely resulting in a reduced school attendance.⁴⁰¹⁶ In a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report published in June 2020, a teacher in Wardak declared that the Taliban have threatened teachers and principals in some districts for working in girls’ schools, particularly when they came from areas under government control.⁴⁰¹⁷

The destruction of residential homes and infrastructure as well as heavy fighting in Wardak’s provincial capital were reported by residents, after a car bomb exploded at an ANA base near Maydan Shahr (see above) in October 2020.⁴⁰¹⁸ In January 2021, civilians living in villages alongside

⁴⁰⁰⁷ An international source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 29; Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 52; Quilty, A., Taliban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan Conflict Has Changed since the Doha Agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#); Intercept (The), The CIA’s Afghan Dead Squads - A US Backed Militia that Kills Children May Be America’s Exit Strategy from Its Longest War, 18 December 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰⁸ Intercept (The), The CIA’s Afghan Dead Squads - A US Backed Militia that Kills Children May Be America’s Exit Strategy from Its Longest War, 18 December 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰⁹ Quilty, A., Taliban Opportunism and ANSF Frustration: How the Afghan Conflict Has Changed since the Doha Agreement, AAN, 12 October 2020, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Afghanistan Remains the “Most Unpeaceful” Country in the World: an Overview of the Security Situation, 27 October 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰¹⁰ Rolling Stone Magazine, Highway to Hell: A Trip Down Afghanistan’s Deadliest Road, 22 January 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰¹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 - 12 July 2020), 15 July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁰¹² UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: Attacks on Healthcare during the Covid-19 Pandemic, June 2020, [url](#), p. 20

⁴⁰¹³ WHO, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (January 01 - December 31, 2020, 11 January 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰¹⁴ IOM, DTM Afghanistan, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results Round 10 Jan-June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), p. 9

⁴⁰¹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰¹⁶ ERM, Protection Analysis Report: May - July 2020, 9 September 2020, [url](#), p. 9

⁴⁰¹⁷ HRW, “You Have No Right to Complain”: Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), p. 36

⁴⁰¹⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, ANA Base in Wardak Comes under Bomb Attack, 15 October 2020, [url](#)

Highway One, carving through Taliban territory in Wardak province, reported on indiscriminate firing from Afghan government forces in an attempt to hold back on advancing militants.⁴⁰¹⁹

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 - 28 February 2021, reporting 1 911 persons displaced from Wardak province, of which the majority (1 463) were displaced within the province itself (all relocating to Maydan Shahr district). The remaining 448 IDPs from Wardak sought shelter in neighbouring province Kabul (Kabul district). The majority of IDPs in Wardak province were displaced from Jalrez district (588) with peaks in the beginning of April and mid-June 2020; followed by Saydabad (350), Maydan Shahr (336) and Nerkh (329) districts, equally with peaks in April and June 2020. Smaller numbers of IDPs were displaced from Daymirdad (140) and Jaghatu (105) districts in August 2020, and Chak district (63) in June 2020. No conflict-induced internal displacement to Wardak province from other provinces was reported by UNOCHA during the same period.⁴⁰²⁰

In February 2021, UNOCHA reported on 700 people displaced in Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud district due to fighting, with needs assessments ongoing to verify this information.⁴⁰²¹

According to IOM displacement data from January to June 2020, Wardak is one of five provinces (the other provinces indicated as Jawzjan, Paktika, Kapisa and Zabul) that showed a sharp increase in the number of IDPs, most likely due to people fleeing to safer areas to escape the ongoing armed conflict. IOM additionally indicated that two in five persons in Wardak province have fled their home as an IDP and that 85 % of IDPs in Wardak have not returned home.⁴⁰²² According to an IOM Community Based Needs Assessment with data from January to June 2020, 32 % of IDP and returnee households in Wardak province, that have been heavily affected by conflict and natural disaster, live in shelters that are severely damaged or destroyed. IOM mentioned access to basic services and conflict as the main reasons for people to leave their area of origin in Wardak province.⁴⁰²³

In UNOCHA's Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) for 2021, Wardak is mentioned as a province where the majority of displaced households don't feel safe on roads. More than a third of the assessed displaced households expressed concerns about explosive hazards in Wardak, among other provinces (such as Logar, Paktika, Farah, Ghazni and Kunduz).⁴⁰²⁴

⁴⁰¹⁹ Rolling Stone Magazine, Highway to Hell: A Trip Down Afghanistan's Deadliest Road, 22 January 2021, [url](#)

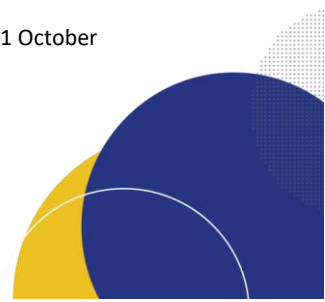
⁴⁰²⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, updated 23 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2021, updated 8 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰²¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (15 - 21 February 2021), 24 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁴⁰²² IOM, DTM Afghanistan, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results Round 10 Jan-June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 5, 7

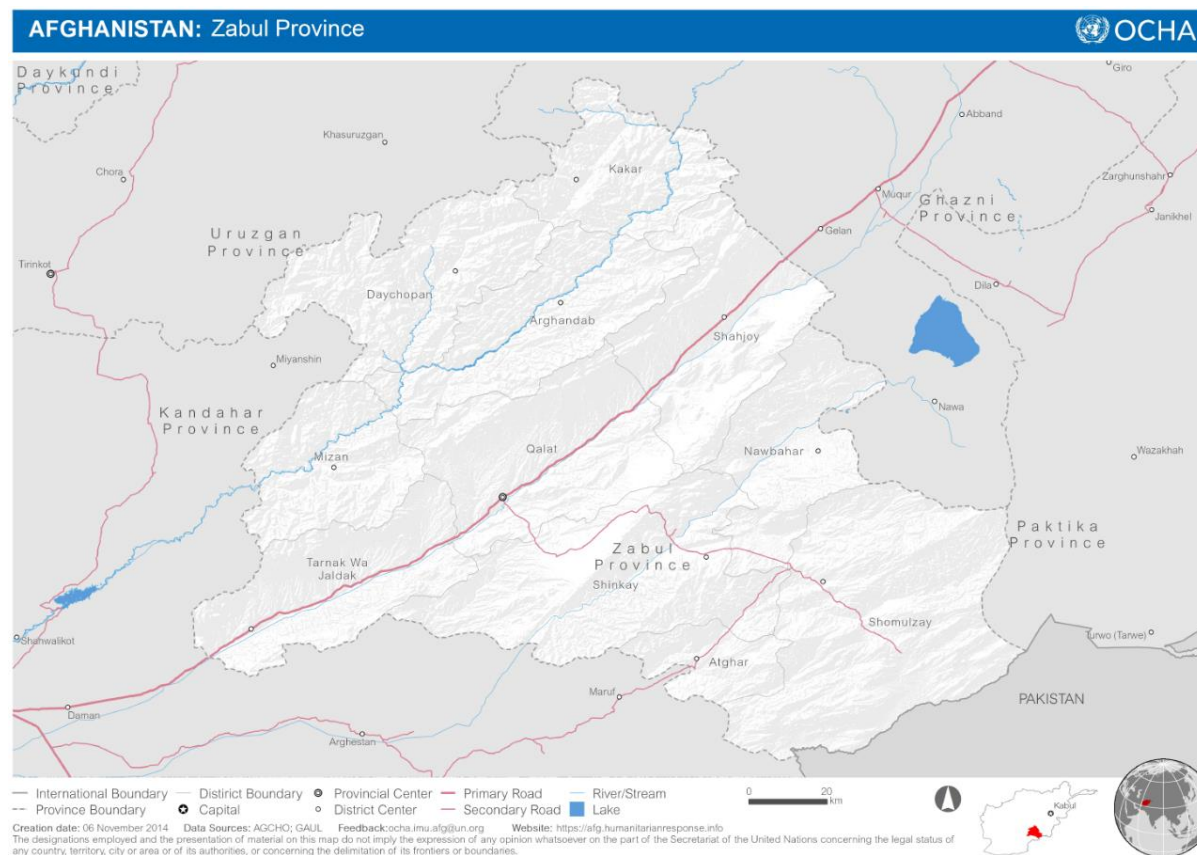
⁴⁰²³ IOM, DTM Afghanistan, Community Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results Round 10 Jan-June 2020, 1 October 2020, [url](#), pp. 3, 12

⁴⁰²⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2021, 19 December 2020, [url](#), p. 137



2.35 Zabul

2.35.1 General description of the province



Map 35: Afghanistan – Zabul province, source: UNOCHA⁴⁰²⁵

Zabul province is located in the southern part of Afghanistan and shares an international border with Pakistan⁴⁰²⁶. Zabul is divided into the following districts: the provincial capital Qalat with provincial capital Qalat city (formerly known as Qalat-i Ghilzai), Tarnak Wa Jaldak (also known as Shahr Safa), Shinkai (also Seori, Seyuri), Mizan, Arghandab, Shah Joi, Daichopan, Atghar, Naw Bahar, Shemel Zayi, Kakar (also known as Khak-e Afghan).⁴⁰²⁷

According to estimates for 2019-2020 by NSIA, Zabul has a population of 377 648. Urban population constitutes about 3.5% of all inhabitants of the province.⁴⁰²⁸

It is composed mainly of Pashtuns belonging mostly to Hotak and Tokhi tribes⁴⁰²⁹ and Baloch.⁴⁰³⁰ The province is also known by the name 'Zabalistan' and is considered the birthplace of the Pashtun ethnic group.⁴⁰³¹

⁴⁰²⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 34

⁴⁰²⁶ US Naval Postgraduate School, Zabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁰²⁷ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 36

⁴⁰²⁸ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2019-2020, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 32

⁴⁰²⁹ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 05 November 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰³⁰ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Zabul, 1 February 2017, [url](#); US Naval Postgraduate School, Zabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁰³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Zabul, n.d., [url](#)

The Kabul-Kandahar Highway, also known by the name of Highway One⁴⁰³², runs through the districts of Tarnak wa Jaldak, Qalat and Shahjoy.⁴⁰³³ The road has a significant strategic relevance, as it connects the capital city with Kandahar. It passes through remote areas of the province, many of which are not under government control. It is a key supply route for the south.⁴⁰³⁴

Zabul also has a 65-kilometre long, porous border with Pakistan⁴⁰³⁵, running through Shemel Zayi district.⁴⁰³⁶ There are three unpaved roads leading to the border-crossing: in the Zanzir area, near Qala-ye Rashid and further north, from where a road leads to the Pakistani city of Zhob.⁴⁰³⁷

2.35.2 Conflict background and actors in Zabul

The province is one of the poorest provinces in the country. The government is present militarily but little development has been done. The feeling of being forgotten by the government is reportedly one of the reasons for the considerable Taliban presence in the area. A lot of Taliban leadership originated from Zabul but very few Zabulis participated in the central government in Kabul.⁴⁰³⁸

Due to proximity of Pakistani border and general poverty, many families migrate from Zabul to Quetta in Pakistani Balochistan to seek greater economic opportunities. Migrant communities in Quetta are under strong influence of religious conservatives and religious parties. It has a very negative impact on security situation in the province.⁴⁰³⁹

In addition, writing in 2013, van Biljiert stated that a lot of conflicting interests contributed to the deterioration of the security situation in the province and shaping insurgents' networks after 2001. In Zabul, some internal tribal tensions also existed: between the two Ghilzai tribes – Tokhi and Hotak, between both Ghilzai tribes and minority tribes but also some animosity between nomadic kuchis and settlers. There were also some land disputes inside certain tribes. Apart from tribal affiliation, there were also important political connections, common battlefield experience, area of origin, economic interest and other ties which shaped relationship in the province.⁴⁰⁴⁰

The corrupt local strongmen became the government officials in Zabul after 2001. They used to abuse their power to target their private rivals.⁴⁰⁴¹ There was also a rivalry between parliamentarians from Zabul and provincial administration over governmental appointments. Both sides blame each other for corruption and incompetence.⁴⁰⁴²

After US and NATO combat mission formally ended in December 2014, the economic and security conditions in Zabul deteriorated. Poverty level increased and access to governmental services worsened. In some districts, local authorities have been removed to military bases in district centres

⁴⁰³² Telegraph (The), Kabul-Kandahar highway is a symbol of what's gone wrong in Afghanistan, 9 September 2012, [url](#)

⁴⁰³³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Zabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

⁴⁰³⁴ Telegraph (The), Kabul-Kandahar highway is a symbol of what's gone wrong in Afghanistan, 9 September 2012, [url](#); Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 05 November 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰³⁵ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 05 November 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰³⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Provincial reference Map, 25 May 2015, [url](#), p. 34

⁴⁰³⁷ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 05 November 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰³⁸ RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁰³⁹ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, AAN, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁴⁰ Bijlert M., 'The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan' in: Bergen, P. (ed.), Talibanistan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp. 98-99

⁴⁰⁴¹ Bijlert M., 'The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan' in: Bergen, P. (ed.), Talibanistan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp. 103, 106

⁴⁰⁴² Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, AAN, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

without any access to residents, unable to provide them any public services. The election turnout both in parliament elections in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019 was very low (at 21%), reportedly due to security reasons.⁴⁰⁴³

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2020, opium poppy cultivation in Zabul province increased by 123 %.⁴⁰⁴⁴

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Zabul province is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force South (TF South), led by US forces.⁴⁰⁴⁵ The government's control is however limited to Qalat⁴⁰⁴⁶ and to some military outposts in the seven southern districts.⁴⁰⁴⁷ Police chiefs and district governors are often linked to the MPs or senators from the region and many of them have served on these posts for many years. In July 2019 President Ghani ordered the transfer or termination of duties some of them. It did not improve the security situation in the area and the number of attacks on soldiers and government employees even increased.⁴⁰⁴⁸

Large-scale insider attacks were also reported in Zabul province. The deadliest one happened on 20 March 2020 when a group of Taliban-linked policemen opened fire on sleeping troops at a joint police and army headquarters near Qalat, killing, according to different estimations, from 24 to 37 army and police personnel.⁴⁰⁴⁹

Zabul province has a historical significance for the Taliban, who started their battle over the control of the country in the 1990s from there. There are many Zabulis in the Taliban's higher ranks including Mullah Amir Khan Haqqani.⁴⁰⁵⁰

Zabul was one of the first provinces affected by Taliban influence after 2001. The recruitment to their movement started in 2002 and soon the Taliban was able to establish its first training base in Daichopan district. In the beginning of the insurgency, Taliban suffered from great losses caused by international air strikes, so they quickly changed methods of fighting 'from large-scale attacks to asymmetrical warfare: ambushes, assassinations, small-scale attacks, IEDs, suicide bombings'.⁴⁰⁵¹

The Zabuli Taliban was formally under control of Pakistani Quetta Shura but it consisted of local commanders who 'alternatively cooperated with, coexisted with, and fought against each other'. Motivation to join Taliban may vary: pressure, opportunism or revenge. The alliances may also change. As in other provinces, the Taliban established a shadow administration with provincial governor, district governors, military commanders, and court and taxation system.⁴⁰⁵²

A survey Pajhwok Afghan News conducted from November 2020 until February 2021 designed 21.52% of Zabul territory and population under government control, 72.73% of territory and population under Taliban control and 5.76% territory and population controlled by neither side. The

⁴⁰⁴³ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, AAN, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁴⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

⁴⁰⁴⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

⁴⁰⁴⁶ RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁴⁷ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁴⁸ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, AAN, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁴⁹ Al Jazeera, Dozens of Afghan troops killed in insider attack: Officials 20 March 2020, [url](#); Khaama News, Abdullah reacts to deadly Taliban attack in Zabul, calling it 'An Unforgivable Crime' 21 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁵⁰ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁵¹ Bijlert M., 'The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan' in: Bergen, P. (ed.), Talibanistan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, p. 116

⁴⁰⁵² Bijlert M., 'The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan' in: Bergen, P. (ed.), Talibanistan, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, p. 110

entire districts with its centres under Taliban control are: Naw Bahar, Khak Afghar and Daichopan.⁴⁰⁵³ According to LWJ, Mizan, Arghandab, Shah Joi, Kakar and Naw Bahar is fully controlled by Taliban. Three districts of Zabul are reportedly contested: Tarnak Wa Jaldak, Shinkai, Shemel Zayi and Daichopan on the north. Atghar was allegedly stormed by Taliban in July 2020 but the information is not confirmed. According to the LWJ, only Qalat capital district is under full governmental control. More recently, as of 26 May 2021, Daichopan shifted under the 'Taliban control'.⁴⁰⁵⁴ Earlier on 25 May 2021, the Taliban reportedly reached the gates of Qalat.⁴⁰⁵⁵

The United Nations also reported that Zabul is one of three provinces 'with the most significant numbers' of al Qaeda operatives present.⁴⁰⁵⁶

There is no known presence of ISIL-KP in Zabul. UNAMA did not documented civilian casualties from ISIL-KP attacks in Helmand in 2019 or 2020.⁴⁰⁵⁷

2.35.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

General

In 2020, UNAMA documented 303 civilian casualties (120 deaths and 183 injured) in Zabul province. This represents a decrease of 39 % compared to 2019. Leading causes of casualties were non-suicide IEDs, ground engagements, and air strikes.⁴⁰⁵⁸

In the period from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2021, ACLED reported a total of 253 incidents related to security in Zabul province, of which 162 were coded as battles, 76 as remote violence, 15 as violence against civilians.⁴⁰⁵⁹

⁴⁰⁵³Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt, Taliban make exaggerated claims of territory they control, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁵⁴LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was updated.

⁴⁰⁵⁵Sarwary, B., (@bsarwary), [Twitter], posted on: 25 May, 25 May 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁵⁶UN Security Council, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, S/2019/481, 13 June 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁵⁷UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 43; UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, February 2020, [url](#), p. 36

⁴⁰⁵⁸UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2020, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 110

⁴⁰⁵⁹EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED made a methodological note on its website on a shift in reporting depicting a reduction in violence and advises against drawing comparisons in violence/fatalities in Afghanistan between 2019 and 2020 (see: introduction). ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Zabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

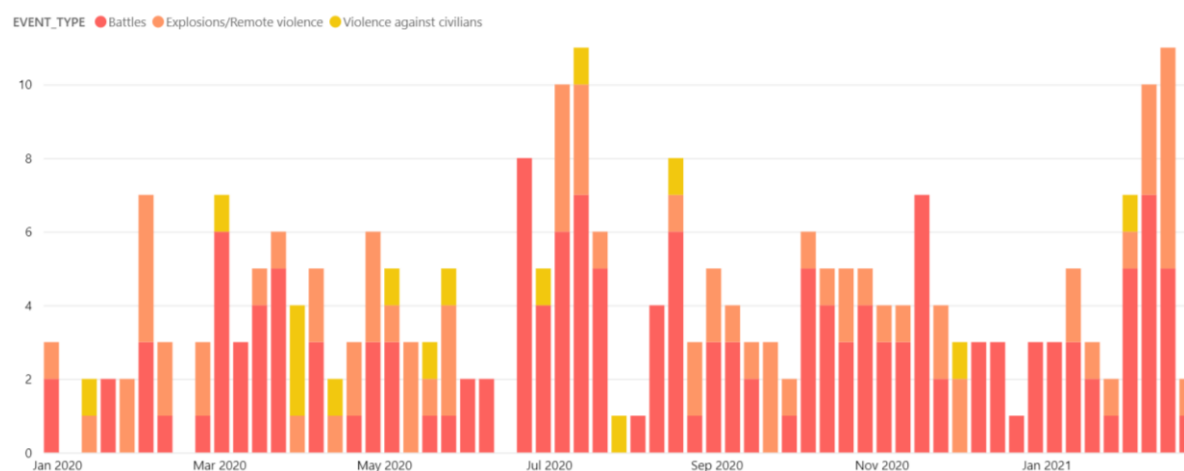


Figure 68: Zabol province - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2020, based on ACLED data⁴⁰⁶⁰

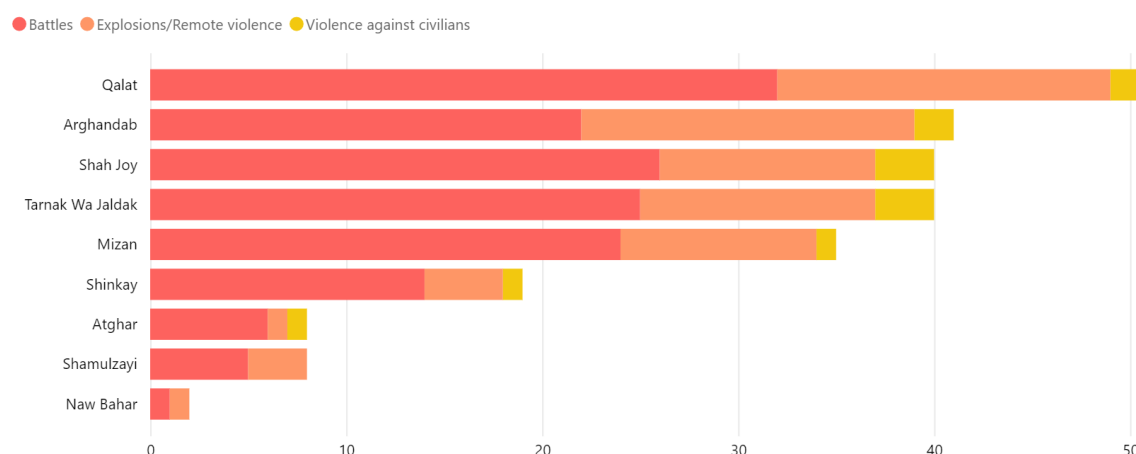


Figure 69: Zabol province - Breakdown of security events per district from 1 January 2020 to 28 February 2020, based on ACLED data⁴⁰⁶¹

In 2020, Taliban was able to attack check-posts in the Qalat city and to kill soldiers and other security personnel there. For example, on 10 October 2020, 75 Afghan soldiers were taken as hostages within Qalat city as reported by Taliban.⁴⁰⁶²

In October 2020 there was a major military operation in Shinkai district when Taliban had stormed the security checkpoints there. At least 34 Taliban insurgents were killed and at least 12 were wounded. The government managed to repel attacks.⁴⁰⁶³ Apart from Shinkai, heavy fighting took place also in Mizan, Tarnak Wa Jaldak, Arghandab districts in 2020 and at the beginning of 2021.⁴⁰⁶⁴

Taliban insurgents have been carrying out activities related to terrorism such as shootings, suicide attacks and planting IED bombs resulting in casualties among civilians, the Afghan security forces and

⁴⁰⁶⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Zabol province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Zabol province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#); 7 battles in the province for which ACLED has no information about the location, were not included in this graph (geoprecision code 3 – see introduction)

⁴⁰⁶² Voice of Jihad, 75 enemy personnel arrested in Qalat operations, 10 October 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶³ MENAFN, Afghanistan- Tens of Taliban rebels killed in Zabol raids, 19/10/2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶⁴ EASO analysis based on UN UNOCHA Afghanistan Weekly Humanitarian Update, Humanitarian Response, Situation Report, 01 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, [url](#)

the insurgents themselves.⁴⁰⁶⁵ On 16 January 2020, an explosion of a roadside bomb killed five officials from Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS), an Afghan Power Company, who travelled to repair a power line.⁴⁰⁶⁶ On 19 May 2020, an IED planted in Mizan district killed four civilians and wounded another eight, including children.⁴⁰⁶⁷ On 10 July 2020, an explosion of IED in Qalat city killed three children.⁴⁰⁶⁸ On 30 August 2020 several IEDs planted by Taliban exploded in various villages in Shah Joi district, killing at least 6 people.⁴⁰⁶⁹ On 28 October 2020 three civilians were killed and five injured by roadside bomb in Shinkai district.⁴⁰⁷⁰ On 7 November 2020, at least 3 civilians were killed and 15 were wounded, including two guards, in a suicide attack when a car parked outside the office of provincial council head in Qalat exploded.⁴⁰⁷¹ Another suicide attack in Qalat took place on 29 November 2020. At least 3 civilians were killed and 23 wounded, including the head of Zabul's provincial council, Ata Jan Haqbayan. No one has taken responsibility for the two attacks.⁴⁰⁷²

Airstrikes by Afghan and US forces continued throughout 2020. Taliban sources reported in February 2020 that NATO drone strike killed two civilians in Arghandab district.⁴⁰⁷³ In April 2020, an airstrike of NATO forces killed five civilians in the same district.⁴⁰⁷⁴ In May 2020, shelling by Afghan military forces killed 3 women and 2 children in residential area of Shah Joi district.⁴⁰⁷⁵ On 27 May 2020, at least 3 children were killed by Afghan forces airstrikes in the same district.⁴⁰⁷⁶ On 11 July 2020 three children were killed in an Afghan mortar shelling in Shemel Zayi district.⁴⁰⁷⁷ During the reporting period, Taliban fighters were able to target civilians in Qalat City.⁴⁰⁷⁸ On 28 May 2020, a human rights defender was killed, reportedly by the Taliban.⁴⁰⁷⁹

According to Taliban sources, Afghan security forces and pro-governmental militias also killed several civilians in Zabul province during 2020 and 2021: two civilians were shot dead in Tarnak Wa Jaldak in January 2020⁴⁰⁸⁰ and two civilians in February 2021⁴⁰⁸¹. One farmer in Mizan district⁴⁰⁸² was killed in May; a merchant in Shah Joi district⁴⁰⁸³ and a girl were killed in Shinkai in July⁴⁰⁸⁴; a civilian was killed working in his garden in Atghar district in August 2020.⁴⁰⁸⁵

⁴⁰⁶⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Zabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶⁶ Tolonews, Five DABS Employees Killed In Zabul Blast, 17 January 2020, [url](#); SATP, Afghanistan Zabul, Timeline-Fatalities, 16 January 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶⁷ Khaama News, Children, women among 12 killed, wounded in Taliban IED attack in Zabul 19 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶⁸ SATP, Afghanistan Zabul, Timeline, Fatalities, 16 January 2020, updated 10 July 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁶⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Zabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷⁰ ANI News, 3 killed, 5 injured in bomb blast in Afghanistan's Zabul, 28/10/2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷¹ Reporterly, Three Killed, 15 Wounded in Zabul Car Bomb Blast, 7 November 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷² Tolonews, 3 Civilians Killed, 23 Wounded in Zabul Suicide Attack 29 November 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷³ Voice of Jihad, Drone martyrs 2 villagers, hurts 2 others in Zabul, 09 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷⁴ Voice of Jihad, 15 civilians martyred and wounded as a result of US and internal forces brutality in Zabul and Uruzgan, 05 April 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷⁵ Voice of Jihad, 7 including women, children martyred and wounded by enemy shelling in Zabul, 13 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷⁶ Voice of Jihad, 6 children martyred, wounded amid enemy bombardment in Zabul, 27 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷⁷ Voice of Jihad, 3 children martyred from enemy shelling in Zabul, 12 July 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Zabul province, update 25 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁷⁹ Frontline Defenders, Human rights defender Ibrahim Ebrat killed, 29 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸⁰ Voice of Jihad, Enemy martyrs 2 villagers in Zabul night raid, 15 January 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸¹ Voice of Jihad, Enemy martyr 3 villagers, abduct prayer leader in Zabul, 4 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸² Voice of Jihad, Enemy bombing martyr, hurt 4 villagers in Zabul, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸³ Voice of Jihad, Enemy martyrs shopkeeper in Shajoy, 30 July 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸⁴ Voice of Jihad, Enemy firing martyrs 13-years-old girl in Zabul, 06 July 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸⁵ Voice of Jihad, Enemy martyrs villager in Zabul, 22 August 2020, [url](#)

The main hospital in the province was completely destroyed and abandoned in 2019. The only part still standing is a paediatric ward which has been adapted as an isolation centre for patients with COVID-19 in the spring 2020.⁴⁰⁸⁶

Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2020 – 28 February 2021, reporting 4 843 persons displaced within Zabul province. They were displaced from different districts of the province such as Qalat, Shinkai, Mizan and Tarnak Wa Jaldak. Most of them moved to provincial capital Qalat. The biggest group of 2 947 persons left their houses in Shinkai in September and October 2020. Most of the group stayed within the district or moved to Qalat city. No displacement from other provinces was registered in Zabul province.⁴⁰⁸⁷

According to UNOCHA humanitarian assessment, hundreds of people left their homes in Zabul due to insecurity in September 2020. The district affected by hostilities were Shinkai, Arghandab, Mizan and Qalat. Over 700 habitants from Shinkai left their homes. In Arghandab, Mizan and Qalat, civilian movement was disrupted by roadside IEDs and people in need could not reach medical aid.⁴⁰⁸⁸

⁴⁰⁸⁶ Guardian (The), Civil war, poverty and now the virus: Afghanistan stands on the brink, 2 May 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Conflict Induced Displacements in 2020, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁸⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Weekly Humanitarian Update, 14-20 September 2020, [url](#)

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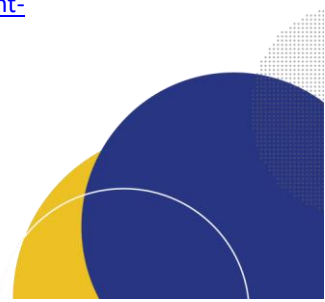
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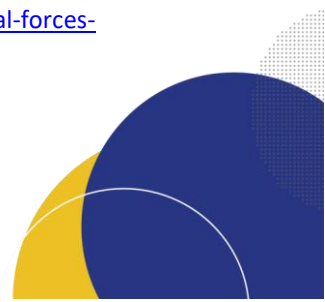
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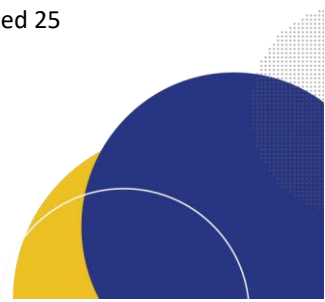
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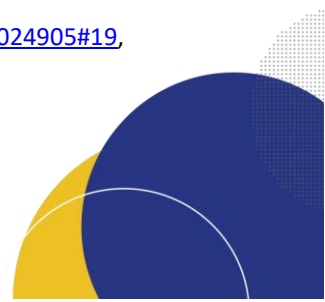
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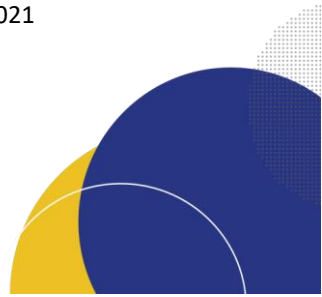
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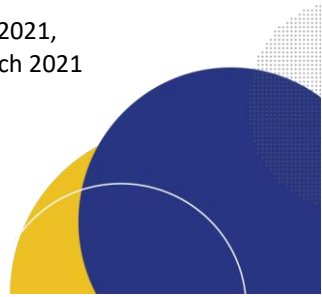
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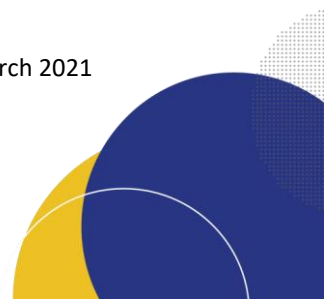
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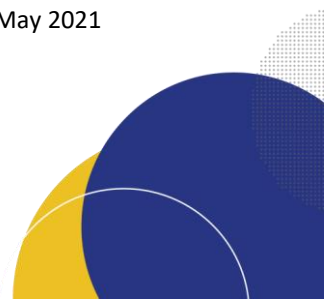
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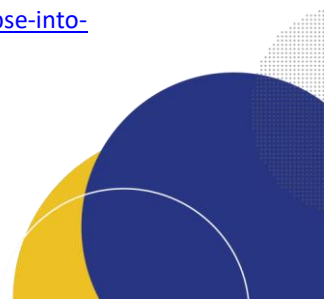
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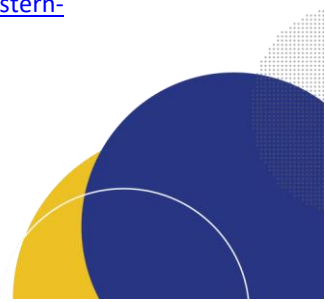
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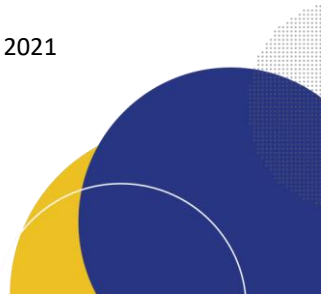
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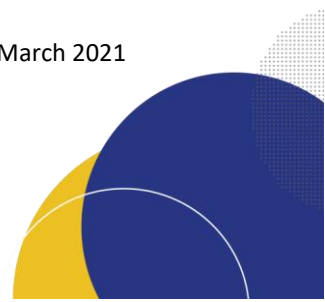
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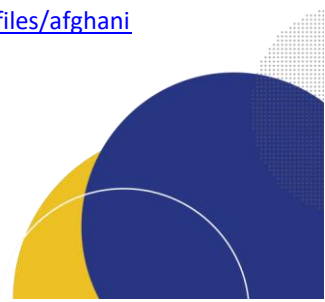
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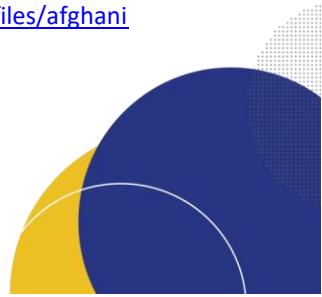
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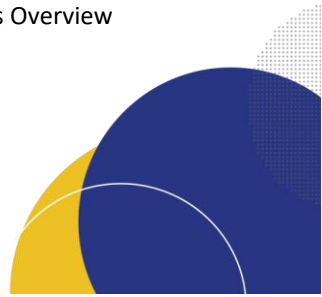
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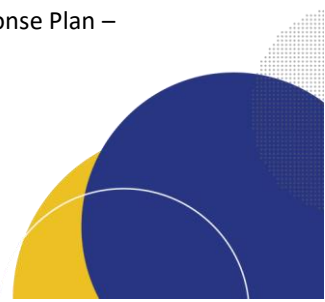
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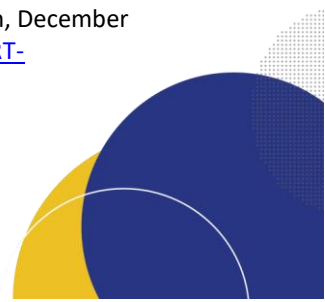
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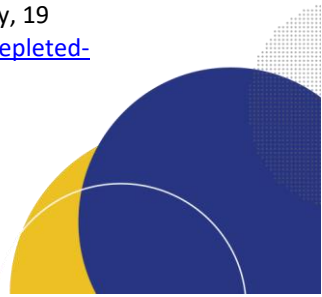
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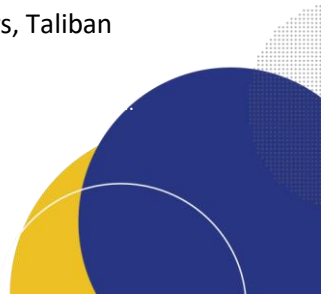
Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The goal of this report is to provide security-related information relevant for international protection status determination.

An important goal of this report is to provide details on a regional, provincial or even district level. The reporting period for incidents and events illustrating the general trends of the conflict is 1 January 2020 until 28 February 2021.

The content of the report should contain information on the following topics:

- **General description of the security situation**
 - Conflict background
 - Overview of recent conflicts in Afghanistan
 - Political landscape
 - Peace talks
 - International context
 - Actors in the conflict
 - Pro-government forces
 - Tasks/roles/numbers
 - Components
 - Civilian casualties' attribution
 - Anti-government elements
 - Level of organisation
 - Civilian casualties' attribution
 - Recent security trends and armed confrontations
 - Trends, nature of violence and methods primarily used
 - Impact of the violence on the civilian population
 - Civilian casualties
 - State ability to secure law and order
 - Socio-economic situation
 - Refugees, IDPs, returnees
 - Children
 - Geographical overview
 - Broad regional differences
 - Insurgent control
 - Conflict severity
 - Mobility
 - security aspects of travelling (roads, flights)
- **Regional description: per province**
 - General description (districts, population, geography, economy)
 - Conflict background (description on presence and general activity of actors, Taliban control/presence)



- Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population
 - Civilian casualties
 - Conflict severity
 - Incident numbers
 - Description of representative incidents
 - Displacement



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