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Overview: Primary responsibility for security in Afghanistan transitioned in January 2015 from U.S. and international forces, operating under the then NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Mission, to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), while U.S. forces maintain the capacity to conduct counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan as outlined in the U.S.-Afghan Bilateral Security Agreement. In 2016, the majority of counterterrorism operations were carried out in partnership with, or solely by, Afghan forces. Additionally, the United States supported Afghan efforts to professionalize and modernize Afghanistan's security forces through the contribution of almost 7,000 U.S. troops to the NATO Resolute Support Mission, a non-combat mission to train, advise, and assist Afghan security forces to improve their readiness and capabilities.

The fighting between the ANDSF and the Taliban throughout 2016 was characterized by the capture and recapture of facilities and territory by both sides, with the ANDSF maintaining control of major population centers – provincial capitals and the majority of district centers – while the Taliban gained or maintained control of substantial territory in less populated, rural areas (although it was able to regularly exert pressure on population centers), thereby creating an environment of persistent insecurity. Despite repeated sieges, the Taliban were unable to fully capture and hold provincial government capitals in Farah, Helmand, Kunduz, and Uruzgan. The Taliban, and the affiliated Haqqani Network (HQN), also increased high-profile terrorist attacks targeting Afghan government officials – including justice officials – and members of the international community.

ISIS's radical and violent ideology, combined with larger payments to fighters and their families, attracted disaffected elements of insurgent and terrorist groups in Afghanistan, however, a vast majority of Afghans, including Afghanistan-based militants such as the Taliban, rejected ISIS's ideology and brutal tactics. Islamic State's Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) presence was primarily limited to some areas of Nangarhar and Kunar provinces. The ANDSF and U.S. counterterrorism operations killed hundreds of ISIS-K fighters, including ISIS-K leader Hafiz Saeed Khan in July 2016 in Nangarhar Province. On numerous occasions, Taliban and ISIS-K fighters clashed over control of territory and resources. ISIS-K conducted a number of high-profile attacks during the second half of 2016.

2016 Terrorist Incidents: Insurgents across Afghanistan used a variety of tactics to expand their territorial influence, disrupt governance, and create a public perception of instability. According to ANDSF statistics, ANDSF casualties were 30 percent higher in 2016 than in 2015. Insurgents continued to use large vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED) and complex attacks involving multiple attackers laden with suicide vests working in teams to target ANDSF, Afghan government buildings, foreign governments, and soft civilian targets to include international organizations. Kabul remained a focus of high-profile attacks. Baghlan, Farah, Ghazni, Helmand,

Kunar, Nangarhar, and Uruzgan were the most dangerous provinces for ANDSF and civilians. U.S. citizens and foreigners continued to be targeted in kidnapping operations.

High-profile incidents included:

- On January 4, the Taliban claimed responsibility for detonating a VBIED near U.S. facility Camp Sullivan in Kabul, destroying several buildings and damaging the outer wall.
- On January 20, a Taliban suicide bomber drove a car loaded with explosives into a minibus carrying employees of Afghanistan's largest television network, Tolo TV. The blast killed seven Tolo employees and injured 25.
- On April 19, HQN attackers detonated a VBIED on a National Directorate of Security (NDS) compound adjacent to the International Zone housing foreign embassies, killing 64 people and wounding 347 Afghans. This was the largest terrorist attack in an urban area since 2001 in terms of overall casualties.
- On June 20, an ISIS-K member detonated a suicide vest next to a bus carrying Nepali security guards from the Canadian Embassy, killing 16 people.
- On July 23, an ISIS-K member detonated a suicide vest at a peaceful demonstration by the Hazara ethnic minority group in Kabul, killing 80 people and wounding 231 people.
- On August 1, the Taliban detonated a 3,000 pound VBIED at the Northgate Hotel in Kabul. One Afghan National Police officer died in the subsequent fighting.
- On August 8, two American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) professors, one American and one Australian, were kidnapped in Kabul while traveling in their vehicle.
- On August 24, three insurgents attacked the AUAF in Kabul, killing seven students, seven teachers, three police officers, and two security guards. At least 35 other people were wounded, and all three of the attackers were killed. No group claimed responsibility for this attack, although many alleged it was the Taliban.
- On September 5, a Taliban suicide bomber killed 30, including several senior security officials, and wounded more than 90 people when explosives were detonated near the Ministry of Defense.
- On October 11, three ISIS-K terrorists assaulted the Ziarat-e-Sakhi mosque in Kabul as Shia Muslims commemorated Ashura, killing 17 individuals and injuring 58 others.
- On November 10, insurgents attacked the German Consulate in the provincial capital of Mazar-e-Sharif. The terrorists are widely believed to have belonged to the Taliban or its HQN affiliate. Terrorists killed one civilian and wounded 35 people when they used a VBIED to penetrate the security wall at the consulate. No German nationals were wounded, although the Consulate was severely damaged and will not reopen.
- On November 12, an Afghan employee at Bagram Airfield detonated a suicide vest inside the base at the behest of the Taliban, killing three U.S. soldiers, two U.S. contractors and wounding 14 people (13 U.S. citizens and one Polish national).

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: The Afghan Attorney General's Office investigates and prosecutes violations of the laws that prohibit membership in terrorist or insurgent groups, violent acts committed against the state, hostage taking, murder, and the use of explosives against military forces and state infrastructure, including the *Law on Crimes against the Internal and External Security of the State* (1976 and 1987), the *Law on Combat Against Terrorist Offences* (2008), and the *Law of Firearms, Ammunition, and Explosives* (2005).

In early 2014, the Justice Center in Parwan (JCIP) at Bagram Airfield began adjudicating cases of individuals detained by Afghan security forces who were never held in Coalition Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) detention. The JCIP is the only counterterrorism court in Afghanistan that has nationwide jurisdiction. Notable cases tried during 2016 included:

- Fazal Rabi, who was convicted of providing financial and logistical support to the HQN and the Taliban, while based in Pakistan. He was sentenced to 10 years confinement by the primary court on August 8. His case was awaiting an appellate court trial at year's end.
- Shaiuqullah was arrested in connection with rocket attacks on Bagram Airfield, which resulted in the death of a U.S. Defense Logistics Agency civilian. Shaiuqullah was found guilty of the lesser charge of membership in a terrorist organization by the primary court on May 9. He was sentenced to three years' confinement. The case was with the appellate court at year's end, which has ordered the NDS and Afghan prosecutors to provide more direct evidence supporting the murder charge.
- Anas Haqqani, who was detained in 2014, was sentenced to death by the primary court on August 29 for recruiting and fundraising on behalf of the HQN. Anas is the brother of Sirajuddin Haqqani, the deputy leader of the Taliban. The case remained in the Afghan legal system at the end of 2016.

On several occasions, U.S. law enforcement agencies assisted the Ministry of Interior, NDS, and other Afghan authorities to take action to disrupt and dismantle terrorist operations and prosecute terrorist suspects.

Afghanistan continued to process traveler arrivals and departures at major points of entry using the Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES). The system has been valuable for Afghanistan's law enforcement and counterterrorism authorities in investigative and analytical efforts, and has been successfully integrated with INTERPOL's i-24/7 system.

Afghanistan continued to face significant challenges in protecting the country's borders, particularly in the border regions with Pakistan. The Afghan Border Police leadership has stated its numbers and weaponry are insufficient to successfully secure border areas where they face difficult terrain, logistical challenges, and a heavily armed and determined insurgency.

Afghan civilian security forces continued to participate in the Department's Anti-Terrorism Assistance program, receiving capacity-building training and mentorship in specialized counterterrorism-related skillsets such as crisis response.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Afghanistan is a member of the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering, a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional body. Afghanistan remains on FATF's list of "jurisdictions with strategic deficiencies" (the "gray list"). Specifically, insufficient cooperation and lack of capacity among government agencies continued to hamper terrorist finance investigations in Afghanistan.

In 2016, the FATF called on Afghanistan to "provide additional information regarding the implementation of its legal framework for identifying, tracing, and freezing terrorist assets [and] continue implementing its action plan to address the remaining anti-money laundering/combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) deficiencies." Afghanistan's financial intelligence unit, the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Center of Afghanistan (FinTRACA), a member of the

Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units, expressed its intent to reach the FATF action plan milestones.

Terrorist financing is a criminal offense in Afghanistan. In 2016, the attorney general issued an order immediately freezing assets of individuals and entities designated under UN Security Council resolutions 1267 and 1988. The Afghan government distributes UN sanctions lists under the 1267 and 1988 sanctions regimes to financial institutions via a link on FinTRACA's website. To ensure full compliance with international standards on asset freezing, FATF recommended increased awareness among various relevant authorities about its obligations under the country's CFT law.

Afghan officials indicated that because al-Qa'ida, the Taliban, and terrorist organizations from the Central Asian republics transfer their assets person-to-person or through informal banking system mechanisms like the *hawala* system, it is difficult to track, freeze, and confiscate assets. On occasions when more formal illicit transactions have come to the attention of the Afghan government, either via FinTRACA or security agencies, these entities reportedly worked promptly to both freeze and confiscate those assets.

The country's counterterrorist finance law considers non-profit organizations as legal persons and requires them to file suspicious transaction reports. Similarly, money services businesses (MSBs), like *hawaladars* (brokers who informally transfer money within the *hawala* system), are required to register with and provide currency transaction reports to FinTRACA. Although these reports are not always consistently filed, supervision of *hawalas* and other MSBs is improving. FinTRACA revoked 61 business licenses and imposed \$45,000 in fines on MSBs in 2016 for failure to comply with anti-money laundering/counterterrorist financing laws.

For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, please see the *2017 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume 2, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes*: <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>.

Countering Violent Extremism: Since taking office in 2014, President Ghani has actively engaged on countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts, requesting that the Ulema Council, the recognized scholars and authorities on Islam in Afghanistan, condemn insurgent attacks and issue calls for peace in mosques throughout the country. President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah reached out in the beginning of their tenure (2014) to civil society groups to understand the challenges of violent extremism and explore ways to counter these challenges. In an effort to stem discontent, President Ghani also visited a number of prisons and detention facilities to address inmate complaints about poor conditions and inequitable clemency programs. Afghan religious leaders and government officials attended conferences at the Hedayah Center, an International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism in Abu Dhabi.

Since late 2015, the Afghan Office of the National Security Council (ONSC) has been working, with international donor support, to develop a national strategy to counter violent extremism. The ONSC created an inter-ministerial working group to develop and implement the strategy, and supported a series of provincial-level conferences on CVE designed to elicit feedback from provincial leaders on the best way to prevent and counter violent extremism in their communities. This feedback will be integrated into the final government strategy.

The lack of oversight over religious activities at mosques remained an issue as only 50,000 out of 160,000 mosques are registered with the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education. Weak regulation of religious institutions has led to a number of unregistered mosques with associated religious schools (madrassas) operating independently of the government.

While executing the fighting season campaign against the Taliban, President Ghani has simultaneously encouraged the Taliban and other insurgent groups to join a peace process. Supported by the United States and other members of the international community, the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), launched in 2010, was the government's main tool for the implementation of peace activities, including the demobilization and reintegration of former insurgents, provincial-level peace outreach, engagement with the Ulema on CVE, and national-level reconciliation initiatives with senior Taliban leadership. Since its inception, the APRP claims to have reintegrated more than 11,074 former combatants, including 1,051 key commanders.

In 2016, the Afghan government transitioned away from the APRP towards a new, as yet unfinished project to create a broader Afghan National Peace and Reconciliation (ANPR) strategy. ANPR aims to: (1) promote reconciliation with insurgent groups; (2) build domestic and international consensus on the peace process; and (3) institutionalize a "culture of peace."

The Afghan government signed a peace agreement with the Hizb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) group in September, which was broadly supported by political groups. Successful implementation of the HIG agreement in 2017 and beyond, which was the first signed by an insurgent group after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, could set an example for other insurgent groups to follow.

Regional and International Cooperation: The Afghan government consistently emphasized the need to strengthen joint cooperation to fight terrorism and violent extremism in a variety of bilateral and multilateral fora. Notable among them is the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, in which regional countries have committed to counterterrorism cooperation. Afghanistan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates lead the Counterterrorism Confidence Building Measure within the Process. The Afghan government also works closely with the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the United Nations Regional Center for Preventative Diplomacy for Central Asia to facilitate regional cooperation on a range of issues, including counterterrorism. Afghanistan is also an observer state within regional security organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization; Afghanistan joined the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS as its 66th member.