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Afghanistan: The Prospects for a Real Peace



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Afghanistan: The Prospects for a Real Peace

Anthony H. Cordesman

Afghanistan is sometimes referred to as the “graveyard of empires.” In practice, it has been the “graveyard of Afghans” – a nation where outside powers have always found it more costly to remain in Afghanistan than their presence there was worth. Russia – like so many of Afghanistan’s past conquerors – has survived and has prospered from leaving. The United States might also follow suit, as it has never faced a serious strain from its role in Afghanistan and can leave regardless of the success or failure of its current efforts to leave as part of a negotiated peace deal.

It is the Afghans that face the risks from any peace process and the costs of any failure to create peace that actually brings stability and security. They have now been in a state of war since the late 1970s – for more than four decades and for longer than the lives of the vast majority of today’s Afghans. And, far too much of Afghanistan’s history has been repeated during this period.

Afghanistan has had long periods of peace – and even its own empires – but time after time the nation has divided, become a regional backwater, or succumbed to civil war. Today, as was in the past, the nation’s leaders and factions have served their own interests, divided the nation, and plunged it into civil war – all at the expense of their peoples. The end result undermined Afghanistan’s development and its capability to defend its own interests.

The Burke Chair is issuing a new “e-book” that addresses these issues in depth. It is entitled *Afghanistan: The Prospects for a Real Peace*, and is available on the CSIS website [here](#).

As this analysis shows, history repeats itself whether is its forgotten or not, and it does so in the United States as well as in Afghanistan. As was the case in Vietnam, the current peace effort seems to be at least as much the result of a United States effort to leave the country as it is one to find a real peace. As the analysis shows in depth, it is also a peace effort that so far has failed to address Afghanistan’s current level of dependence on U.S. military forces and massive amounts of U.S. civil and military financial aid.

The peace effort is also ignoring critical structural problems in Afghan politics, governance, economy, and the creation of effective security forces. The analysis uses a wide range of data, maps, and charts to compare key official and outside sources on each of these issues. These sources include comparative excerpts and data from the latest security and threat reporting by the Department of Defense (DoD), the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the Lead Inspector General (LIG), the UN, NATO, and the Resolute Support (RS) Command. In the process, the “e-book” also addresses the present and future role of U.S. aid, the role of U.S. and allied military forces, and the impact of present withdrawal plans.

This comparative analysis also addresses reporting on Afghan politics, governance, Afghan security force development, and on Afghan economics and popular needs by the IMF, UN, World Bank, CIA, Afghan government, and other sources. These sources – and various NGO and media reports – are compared in depth, and the key differences between them are analyzed in detail.

A Taliban and a Central Government that Both Fail the Afghan People

The analysis does find some reasons for hope, but it also finds more problems than solutions. It finds that there is a serious risk that the U.S. may leave without having created a peace that can offer lasting stability and the security.

The peace agreements to date do more to expedite a U.S. and allied withdrawal than create the conditions that can lead to a lasting and secure peace. It finds that the Taliban remains committed to its ideology, and furthermore, that the Taliban has good reason to negotiate, but the group has more to win by negotiating rather than seeking a real peace. Its ongoing military progress, its rising hopes for U.S. withdrawal, and its commitment to its ideology are all key reasons.

A wide range of sources – including the major sources of official U.S. reporting on Afghanistan – indicate that the leaders of the Afghan central government are now a major threat toward the ability to create a lasting peace and a state that can meet the needs and hopes of the Afghan people. More broadly, sources like the World Bank, IMF, UN, and various NGOs provide data that show that the portions of Afghanistan under the central government's control are a "failed state" by any standard.

There are substantial official sources that show that Afghanistan was not winning against the Taliban before the peace agreements, even with massive U.S. combat air and intelligence support as well as with the extensive support from allied forces and cadres of U.S. special forces, elite units, train and assist forces, and intelligence operators.

Security remains a critical and growing problem even with major outside U.S. and allied support. The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) are making progress, but reporting by the two U.S. inspector generals – the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) and the Lead Inspector General (LIG) – show that the ground forces are years away from being able to stand on their own with any confidence, and there are no current plans to create an Afghan Air Force that could provide the level of combat capability the U.S. and its allies have provided since 2013.

The civil development of the country poses equally difficult challenges to any effort toward creating a secure and stable peace. Afghanistan has steadily fallen behind the pace of development in other poor regional states. It has regressed in many ways since the Afghan monarchy began to collapse in a mix of internal power struggles in the 1970s. It continued to do so during 1972 to 1989, in spite of a massive Soviet effort. It did so under the Taliban before 2001. It has done so in spite of the massive U.S. and international aid effort that began in 2001.

Afghan elections have not produced either a working political system or effective governance in the areas controlled by the central government. Afghanistan has not moved towards effective economic development and does not adequately meet the basic needs of its people. Its current economy can only function if it is supported indefinitely by massive outside aid, and if it remains heavily dependent on being the world's major source of opiates.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the current peace efforts in Afghanistan are uncertain at best. So far, the peace agreements simply layout a possible schedule for negotiations and U.S. withdrawals, rather than define a real peace. It is far from clear that the Afghan central government and the Taliban can reach a stable, workable peace agreement. The Afghan government has critical military weaknesses and civil flaws, creating serious questions as to whether it can lay the groundwork for some compromise with the Taliban or survive on its own. Most of these Afghan problems are the fault of Afghan politicians and leaders, and it is unclear that Afghanistan's politics and governance can improve to the point where the central government either wins a peace or wins a war.

Moreover, it is unclear that the United States will continue to support the Afghan government if a peace settlement fails. The U.S. is already cutting its forces and has not made any public commitments to enforce a peace or stay if the negotiations fail. Furthermore, U.S. strategy has changed to focus on competition with China and Russia, the United States faces major new resource constraints because of the Coronavirus crisis, and Afghanistan is no longer a main center of terrorist threat to the United States.

Structure of the Analysis

The analysis begins by examining the challenges the United States faces in leaving Afghanistan and the new pressures the Coronavirus crisis has put on U.S. spending – crises that could affect both the peace process and U.S. willingness to remain in Afghanistan if the peace process falters or fails. It describes both the cuts the United States is already making in Afghan forces and the impact of phasing out all U.S. forces in time to meet the 14-month deadline set in the peace agreements.

The analysis then addresses the risk of the current peace effort devolving into an extension of war by other means, the challenges posed by Afghanistan's internal weaknesses, and the efforts to create effective Afghan security forces that can stand on their own. It shows that both the Afghan central government and the Taliban pose serious problems. This is made clear in the next three sections of the analysis, which address the critical problems in Afghan governance, in the development of Afghan national security forces, and in the Afghan economy – summarizing the key quantitative data in each area.

Finally, the assessment concludes with a brief analysis of whether the United States should withdraw from Afghanistan if the Afghan central government continues to be a failed state or if the current peace agreement breaks down because of its failures.

Sources and Methods

As has been touched upon earlier, this analysis examines each of these issues in depth, and makes extensive use of official and non-governmental reporting. It provides maps, statistics, and trend analyses. It uses quantitative data to address both the prospects for a real peace as well as the ability to create a stable and secure Afghanistan.

It draws on a wide range of reporting, including U.S. government, NATO, World Bank, CIA, UN, and IMF sources to address the data now available in order to show the probability that the current peace agreement can bring a real peace, lasting security, and enduring stability. It presents a wide range of analysis, data, and graphics to address the key problems in creating a lasting peace and the many factors that can “implode” the current peace process.

It also focuses on recent reports to the U.S. Congress by three sources that have exceptional access to U.S. military data and intelligence – the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom Sentinel (LIG), and the semi-annual report (1225 Report) of the Department of Defense (DoD). These reports are based on extensive access to Afghan, NATO, and U.S. senior officers and officials, and the analysis quotes them in depth.

Detailed Contents

The report's Table of Contents follows. It should be noted that the pace of change in all of these areas covered in this analysis is so rapid that it has become a working document that is steadily

updated over time. Outside comments and suggestions are welcome and should be sent to Anthony H. Cordesman at acordesman@gmail.com.

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The Uncertain Terms of an Uncertain Peace

The United States signed a broad peace agreement with the Taliban in Doha on February 29, 2020, and another with the Afghan central government that same day. The May 2020 *Quarterly Report to Congress* by the Lead Inspector General on Operation Freedom's Sentinel (LIG) notes that,¹

On February 29, U.S. and Taliban representatives signed an agreement in which the Taliban agreed to prevent terrorists from using Afghanistan to threaten the United States or its allies. The same day, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani announced a U.S.-Afghanistan joint declaration echoing the agreement between the United States and the Taliban...According to the agreement and the joint declaration, the United States agreed to first reduce its forces from roughly 13,000 to 8,600 within 135 days, and then fully withdraw all remaining forces within the following 9 and a half months, conditioned on the Taliban adhering to the agreement.

These two agreements indicate that the U.S. is seeking to end its military role in Afghanistan within the following 14 months – or by no later than the end of May 2021.² They show that the United States has led these negotiating efforts largely on its own terms, while it is clear from the statements of senior U.S. officials and officers that it is also planning to do so while slashing its funding to Afghanistan.

However, it is far from clear what kind of actual peace settlement the United States is seeking and whether the ongoing U.S. withdrawal of U.S. forces will be actually tied to a successful or enduring peace that will keep the present Afghan central government in place. This is hard to fully determine from the data available in the start of July 2020 – some 122 days into the 540-day period before U.S. forces are scheduled to leave. There are two classified annexes to U.S. peace plans, but so far, no details have leaked as to what kind of enduring commitments – if any – the United States will make in terms of aid or commitments to reintroduce the use of U.S. forces in the case of an emergency.³

Time is critical if a peace is to be reached and tested before U.S. and allied forces are gone. The public details of the peace agreements the United States reached with the Taliban and with the Afghan central government on February 29, 2020, have not received the attention they deserve. However, they set a firm 14-month deadline for U.S. and allied withdrawals while only making general statements about the nature of a peace that really do not firmly commit the United States to any given level of effort to enforce a peace or provide the aid necessary to make that peace workable.⁴

To address this continuing terrorist threat, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States will continue to take the following steps to defeat al-Qaida, its affiliates, and other international terrorist groups or individuals:

1. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan reaffirms its continued commitment not to cooperate with or permit international terrorist groups or individuals to recruit, train, raise funds (including through the production or distribution of narcotics), transit Afghanistan or misuse its internationally-recognized travel documents, or conduct other support activities in Afghanistan, and will not host them.
2. The United States re-affirms its commitments regarding support for the Afghan security forces and other government institutions, including through ongoing efforts to enhance the ability of Afghan security forces to deter and respond to internal and external threats, consistent with its commitments under existing security agreements between the two governments. This commitment includes support to Afghan security forces to prevent al-Qaida, ISIS-K, and other international terrorist groups or individuals from using Afghan soil to threaten the United States and its allies.
3. The United States re-affirms its readiness to continue to conduct military operations in Afghanistan with the consent of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in order to disrupt and degrade efforts by al-Qaida, ISIS-

K, and other international terrorist groups or individuals to carry out attacks against the United States or its allies, consistent with its commitments under existing security agreements between the two governments and with the existing understanding that U.S. counterterrorism operations are intended to complement and support Afghan security forces' counterterrorism operations, with full respect for Afghan sovereignty and full regard for the safety and security of the Afghan people and the protection of civilians.

4. The United States commits to facilitate discussions between Afghanistan and Pakistan to work out arrangements to ensure neither country's security is threatened by actions from the territory of the other side.

...Subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the United States, and the Coalition jointly assess that the current levels of military forces are no longer necessary to achieve security objectives; since 2014, Afghan security forces have been in the lead for providing security and have increased their effectiveness. As such, the parties commit to take the following measures:

1. The United States will reduce the number of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan to 8,600 and implement other commitments in the U.S.-Taliban agreement within 135 days of the announcement of this joint declaration and the U.S.-Taliban agreement, and will work with its allies and the Coalition to reduce proportionally the number of Coalition forces in Afghanistan over an equivalent period, subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement.

2. Consistent with the joint assessment and determination between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the United States, its allies, and the Coalition will complete the withdrawal of their remaining forces from Afghanistan within 14 months following the announcement of this joint declaration and the U.S.-Taliban agreement, and will withdraw all their forces from remaining bases, subject to the Taliban's fulfillment of its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban agreement.

3. The United States re-affirms its commitment to seek funds on a yearly basis that support the training, equipping, advising and sustaining of Afghan security forces, so that Afghanistan can independently secure and defend itself against internal and external threats.

4. To create the conditions for reaching a political settlement and achieving a permanent, sustainable ceasefire, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan will participate in a U.S.-facilitated discussion with Taliban representatives on confidence building measures, to include determining the feasibility of releasing significant numbers of prisoners on both sides. The United States and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan will seek the assistance of the ICRC to support this discussion.

5. With the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan commits to start diplomatic engagement with members of the UN Security Council to remove members of the Taliban from the sanctions list with the aim of achieving this objective by May 29, 2020, and in any case no later than 30 days after finalizing a framework agreement and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.

As an analysis by the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) shows the key aspects that directly affect the U.S. posture in Afghanistan and U.S. security are that,⁵

... the agreement provides for the withdrawal of all U.S. troops and associated nondiplomatic personnel from Afghanistan within 14 months, provided that the Taliban meets a number of conditions. The agreement commits the Taliban to prevent its members and other individuals or groups from using Afghan soil "to threaten the security of the United States or its allies," and to enter into negotiations with the Afghan government to determine "the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire" and to reach "agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan." The joint declaration of the United States and the Afghan government reaffirms U.S. support for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and for continued military cooperation against international terrorist groups.

It also goes on to provide a more detailed view of the agreements as seen by the U.S. government,⁶

...The agreement recognizes four main elements of a comprehensive peace agreement: counterterrorism guarantees to prevent Afghan territory from being used to threaten the security of the United States or its allies, a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign forces, a date for intra-Afghan negotiations, and the condition that participants in the intra-Afghan negotiations will discuss a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire to be announced with an agreement over the future political roadmap for Afghanistan...

According to the “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,” the United States will reduce its military forces from the level of approximately 13,000 personnel at the time of the signing to 8,600, a reduction of approximately 34 percent, in the first 135 days following the agreement. The coalition will also proportionally reduce its forces in the same timeframe. Also during the first 135 days, the U.S. forces and the coalition will withdraw from five bases. The U.S. Government also agreed to review sanctions currently in place against members of the Taliban at the start of intra-Afghan negotiations. Provided that the Taliban upholds its parts of the agreement, the United States and its coalition allies commit to completely withdraw from Afghanistan within 14 months of the signing of the agreement...

The agreement stipulates that the Taliban will prevent any group or individual, including al Qaeda, from using the territory of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States or its allies. Specifically, among the counterterrorism commitments, the agreement provides that Taliban members will not cooperate in any way with individuals or groups threatening the security of the United States and its allies, will not provide these individuals with asylum in Afghanistan, and will not issue these individuals any legal documents such as visas, passports, or travel permits...

Is Half a Peace Plan Better than None?

It should be clear from the text of the peace agreements that they do not implement a full ceasefire or define a real peace. They are attempts, rather, to find ways for the Afghan central government and the Taliban to negotiate directly, to fully conduct a promised prisoner exchange that was part of the initial ceasefire agreement, and to negotiate a clearer Taliban agreement to prevent future acts of terrorism outside Afghanistan.

So far, there is no public indication of any real progress in negotiating ways to create a meaningful central government that includes participation from both the present government and the Taliban. Some reports do indicate that the United States may have more detailed peace plans in the form of two classified annexes to these agreements, but the U.S. government has done little to date to indicate that it will stay in Afghanistan unless the Taliban becomes so aggressive that even the image of a peace process collapses.⁷

It is clear from the broad nature of these agreements that there are many areas they fail to address. It is also clear that these negotiations do not reflect any explicit decisions on either the nature or the level of “peace” that would be established – as distinguished from the timing of U.S. force withdrawals – or on any agreement about how Afghanistan’s government, politics, economy, and security forces would be structured once a peace was actually implemented. A real peace cannot really be defined until the Afghan central government and the Taliban have negotiated an actual agreement, and then actually implementing any such agreement will have to confront a long series of challenges.

The United States has failed to publicly define the peace it wants beyond the broad terms of the February 2020 agreements, to advance any detailed plans to define and secure a peace, and to make it clear that it will actually provide the aid and military contingency plans to secure a peace.

The United States also negotiated the February 2020 agreements with Taliban leaders while informing – rather than fully consulting – the acting Afghan government. This has led to significant tensions between the U.S. and senior Afghan officials like “President” Ghani, particularly over near-term efforts to reduce violence and the exchange of some 5,000 prisoners – measures unilaterally advanced by the United States.

The *LIG Quarterly Report* issued in May 2020 stated that,⁸

... the agreement does not explicitly require the Taliban to renounce or sever ties with the terrorist group. It only requires that the Taliban not provide active support or permit al Qaeda to use Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States or its allies. Additionally, the agreement requires the Taliban not to host any such terrorist groups; to send a clear message that those who pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies have no place in Afghanistan; and prevent these groups from recruiting, training, and fundraising on Afghan soil.

... the agreement focuses on withdrawing foreign forces from Afghanistan, ensuring the Taliban does not allow international threats to emanate from within the country, and securing the Taliban's commitment to enter into intra-Afghan negotiations.

The agreement does not specifically reference the current constitutional government, nor does the agreement assume that the same government will remain in place after an eventual settlement. The agreement states that the U.S. Government will seek positive relations with "the new post-settlement Afghan Islamic government as determined by the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations." DoS officials stated that the structure of a future Afghan government was an issue that must be decided by Afghans during the intra-Afghan negotiations.

Taliban leaders condemn the current Afghan constitution and, by extension, the current Afghan government. In April 2019, a high-ranking Taliban leader characterized Afghanistan's constitution as an imposition of the West and stated that an Afghan constitution should be written by Islamic scholars in an "atmosphere of freedom."

Another critical area that was left unclear was how the peace process, and the actual peace that resulted, would be secured. The *LIG Quarterly Report* addressed this issue as follows:⁹

The agreement stipulates that the intra-Afghan negotiations should begin by March 10, 2020, but this was delayed (see page 36). Specifically, the agreement states that the participants of intra-Afghan negotiations will discuss the terms for a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, including joint implementation mechanisms to be announced concurrently with the agreement on the post-settlement political configuration of Afghanistan. The agreement does not stipulate who will represent the non-Taliban side of the negotiations. However, a joint declaration of the U.S. and Afghan governments issued on the same day as the U.S.-Taliban agreement recognizes the same four elements of a comprehensive peace agreement and states that the intra-Afghan negotiations will be conducted between the Taliban and "an inclusive negotiating team of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan."

According to the DoS, implementation of the U.S.-Taliban agreement will require extensive long-term monitoring to ensure Taliban compliance as the group's leadership has been reluctant to publicly break with al Qaeda. A January 2020 report from the UN's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team stated that the relations between al Qaeda and the Taliban "continue to be close and mutually beneficial, with al Qaeda supplying resources and training in exchange for protection." In an op-ed published by the New York Times on February 20, 2020, Sirjuddin Haqqani, the Taliban Deputy Leader and a U.S. Specially Designated Global Terrorist, downplayed terrorist groups like al Qaeda as "disruptive groups" whose significance was enhanced by "politically motivated exaggerations" made by "warmongers." According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Haqqani "maintains close ties to al Qaeda."

DoS officials stated that under the agreement, the Taliban committed to several significant actions that would prevent any group or individual, including al Qaeda, from using Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies. Specifically, the Taliban committed not to host any individuals or groups—including al Qaeda—that threaten the United States or its allies, and not to allow these groups to train, recruit, or fundraise on Afghan soil. The agreement also requires the Taliban to block their members from cooperating with terrorist groups, among other actions. According to the DoS, the U.S. Government established a monitoring and verification mechanism to judge Taliban compliance with its commitments. The details regarding the implementation arrangements for the agreement are classified and will be reported on in a future report's classified appendix.

DoS officials reported that the U.S. Government is carefully monitoring and tracking the Taliban's progress, and that the pace and phasing of the U.S. troop withdrawal is conditions-based and contingent on the Taliban meeting its obligations. According to the DoS, the United States has the will and capacity to enforce the terms

of this agreement and respond to violations. Secretary Esper echoed these stipulations in his February 29 joint statement with President Ghani and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, stating that “the United States will watch the Taliban’s actions closely to judge whether their efforts towards peace are in good faith.”

One does not have to be an international lawyer to realize the peace agreements do not provide security guarantees, instead only uncertain statements of good intentions.

Time Pressures and the Afghan Government

As noted earlier, the peace agreements added to these problems by setting demanding time schedules before a deeply divided Afghan central government and a Taliban that has its own divisions had ever even formally met. The pressure created by the timeline of negotiations keeps rising with every slip in progress. The LIG report notes that,¹⁰

The U.S.-Taliban agreement provided that the intra-Afghan negotiations were to begin on March 10, 2020. However, the talks were delayed by disagreements regarding prisoner releases, the slow development of an inclusive Afghan government negotiating team, and ongoing violence in the country.

On March 26, more than two weeks after the negotiation start date included in the U.S.-Taliban agreement, the Afghan Minister of Peace announced he had established a 21-member team to negotiate with the Taliban during the intra-Afghan negotiation. As announced, the team would be headed by Masoom Stanekzai, a former National Directorate of Security chief and a supporter of President Ashraf Ghani. The team includes Afghan politicians, former Afghan government officials, and representatives of civil society. Five members of the negotiating team are women.

Shortly after the quarter ended, the Taliban issued a statement accusing the U.S. Government of violating the agreement by conducting air strikes and the Afghan government of delaying the release of Taliban prisoners. According to media reports, the statement threatened an increase in Taliban violence if the group is not satisfied with what it views as U.S. and Afghan government compliance.

Since that time, the central government has reached a power sharing agreement between its two major leaders, which made Abdullah Abdullah its leader for the Afghan government’s side of negotiations. Progress was also made in creating a coordinated central government approach to the peace negotiations when President Ghani and his opponent, Abdullah Abdullah, agreed to a power-sharing agreement on May 17, 2020. Abdullah became the head of the peace-process agreements and will be leading the body named the High Council for National Reconciliation, however – as is noted later in the assessment – the exact details of the central government’s delegation are vague at best.

As of the beginning of July 2020, however, the Afghan central government still had no major formal meetings meeting between the leaders of the central government and the Taliban. Serious fighting still took place between government and Taliban forces at the end of June, and only slow progress had been made in dealing with other obstacles facing the peace talks like carrying out the planned prisoner release.

As for the prisoner releases, the agreement made on February 29, 2020, called for the release of 5,000 Talib prisoners from the central government and 1,000 government prisoners from the Taliban within 10 days of its signing. On March 26, 2020, the Afghan government announced that it would release up to 10,000 prisoners that did not present an immediate threat including women, children, and the elderly. It made the announcement, however, more to slow the spread of the Coronavirus rather than to appease the Taliban. The February agreement did not just call for the release of any prisoner associated with the Taliban, but the Taliban had provided the central government with a specific list of people that the group wanted released.¹¹ A month later, on May 26, 2020, the Afghan central government carried out its single largest prisoner release of 900

Taliban prisoners. Later that same day, a Taliban political spokesman Suhail Shaheen tweeted that, “the Taliban is also planning on releasing a “remarkable number” of government prisoners at a later date.”¹² As of May 27, 2020, the Taliban claimed that they have released 240 captives with ties to the central government, and the Afghan government has released a total of 2,000 Taliban prisoners. Yet, by the end of June, the government had still only released 4,000 prisoners.¹³

Meanwhile, violence against civilians has continued. The Taliban did agree to a three-day ceasefire on May 26, 2020. As the analysis that follows shows, however, the Taliban has not halted attacks on central government officials or on civilians. The Taliban has also accused the government of continuing the fighting, and on April 11, 2020, General Scott Miller, the commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, met the Taliban leadership in Doha after the group threatened to walk-out because their fighters were still being attacked. Meanwhile, ISIS-K continued to attack both government and Taliban targets.

The Taliban did seem to avoid U.S. targets, but it did not make any sustained major reductions in attacks on Afghan forces, officials, and sensitive civil targets.¹⁴ A report in the *New York Times* noted that Javid Faisal, a spokesman for the National Security Council, said the Taliban attacks in the past three months rose nearly 40 percent compared with the same period last year. The Afghan National Security Council reported that the deadliest week of the war occurred in June, and 291 Afghan soldiers were killed by the Taliban. Haidar Afzaly, the head of the Afghan Parliament’s Defense Committee, stated that, “We have had deep concern since the agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban was signed...The only group that has benefited from that is the Taliban, who are seeing their prisoners released.”¹⁵

The Taliban also sent mixed signals regarding al Qaeda. In late June 2020, it denied that al Qaeda had been active in Afghanistan since the Taliban rule had been ended in 2001. It did so even though al Qaeda had continued to report its operations in Afghanistan and General Kenneth F. McKenzie – the commander of USCENTCOM – stated in June 2020 that al Qaeda and its emir, Ayman al Zawahiri, were still operating in Afghanistan. Moreover, it also denied the presence of foreign fighters. This scarcely indicated that the Taliban was prepared to fight other extremist and terrorist movements after a peace settlement.¹⁶

This uncertain progress may only be a warning of the broader problems that will occur in the following months, a period when the central government and the Taliban will have to deal with more complex and challenging issues. As of July 2020, U.S. forces were scheduled to leave in a little over a year. A peace, however, requires a new form of government, agreement on a political system, agreement on new security forces, agreement on government services like education and the award of government jobs, agreement on the nature and reform of the economy, massive adjustments to foreign aid, a new approach to foreign relations, and a host of other factors. The new systems must actually be implemented, and there must be a stable working agreement between a faction-driven government and a highly ideological movement like the Taliban

Multiple Threats to a Real Peace

Several additional sets of issues pose clear threats to the ability to create a real peace that will produce a stable and secure Afghanistan – and/or may lead to a full or major U.S. withdrawal without a real peace settlement:

- **The Taliban may well feel it is winning of war of attrition and negotiate accordingly.** The fighting has generally favored the Taliban since the withdrawal of most U.S. and allied

combat troops. U.S. airpower, Special Forces and other elite troops, Security Force Assistance Brigades, and CIA forces kept the Taliban from seizing major populated areas, but only barely as seen in the case of Kunduz. So far, the fighting has not ended, and the limited cuts in the level of violence warn that “peace” may not become a real peace.

- **The United States commitment to a faltering and divided central government is increasingly uncertain.** The U.S. has made it clear that it is considering major cuts in its support of the Afghan government and Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) regardless of the outcome of any peace negotiations. The United States may not make a firm commitment to come to the military assistance of the Afghan central government if the Taliban fails to support a real peace, or to provide the aid necessary to make even a successful peace agreement function.
- **Any ceasefire or peace can become a power struggle between the factions in the Afghan Central Government and/or local power brokers.** The end result of such a struggle is far more likely to produce a divided country in a state of civil war or some form of limited Taliban victory, rather than a victory by the central government.
- **The Afghan central government is already too weak and too deeply divided to function properly,** and it may not be able to compete with the Taliban in implementing a peace, in leading some new structure of government, or even be able to achieve of political unity once a peace agreement is in place.
- **Afghan security forces seem to be too weak to survive a unified attack by Taliban forces once U.S. forces and advisors leave,** or when U.S. combat air support is no longer available – giving the Taliban added leverage with each cut in U.S. support.
- **Finally, even the best peace agreement will be threatened by the weaknesses, poverty, and corruption in the Afghan economy.** Any peace agreement will leave the government that result dependent on massive outside aid, and the Afghan economy continues to see steady increase in poverty and face economic challenges that go far beyond the current power struggles between the Ghani and the Abdullah Abdullah factions.

These factors make it all too possible that the peace efforts will fail, or that both sides might initially agree to a peace, but then see those negotiations implode when the full peace agreement is put into practice. It is also now clear from both the deadlines in the agreements and from ongoing U.S. actions that the United States may withdraw without leaving a stable Afghanistan behind.

The State of the War Before – and After – the Peace Agreement

One key issue that shapes every aspect of the negotiations is the extent to which the Afghan central government or the Taliban was winning the war before the negotiations produced the February agreement, and whether the central government can survive without the support of U.S. and allied forces. In practice, the answers are uncertain, but do not seem to favor the central government or the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF).

The Afghan central government may not have been losing the war before the agreement, but it was clearly not winning it – even with the U.S. land and air combat support that will now be withdrawn. The Afghan government has continued to hold the major population centers, but it only did so because of major combat air support from U.S. and allied air forces, U.S. military advisory groups and combat elements, and other essential allied support.

Unfortunately, there are major problems in finding enough reliable data on the levels of fighting and corresponding trends during the year before the peace agreements started in order to make such an assessment. The United States, NATO, and the Afghan government have steadily reduced availability of unclassified data that shows negative trends or could be politically embarrassing ever since 2011.

The Department of Defense Assessment

The Department of Defense (DoD) did provide a broad assessment in its semiannual report to Congress at the end of June 2020. It does not provide any details on current trends, but it does provide an official picture of the state of the fighting. It summarizes that state of the war as follows:¹⁷

Afghanistan faces a continuing threat from an externally supported insurgency and terrorist groups. These insurgent, terrorist, and criminal networks constitute a threat to Afghanistan's stability and security. Revenue from drug trafficking, illegal taxation, extortion, illicit mining, and foreign financial support continues to sustain the insurgency and Afghan criminal networks. Additionally, the insurgency continues to receive some sanctuary and support from external actors.

The Taliban's insurgency is still the primary threat to Afghan stability. During this reporting period, the Taliban engaged in a noteworthy seven-day reduction in violence (RIV), which preceded in the February 29 signing of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement. After the RIV ended and U.S.-Taliban Agreement was signed, the Taliban resumed its attacks, primarily targeting ANDSF and GIRoA checkpoints and convoys in rural areas. The Taliban refrained from conducting HPAs in urban population centers and refrained from targeting U.S. and Coalition facilities.

The secondary threat to Afghan stability is from domestic political instability resulting from the protracted recount of votes in the presidential election, contested election results, and the opposition's attempts to form a parallel government. This political instability contributed to the lack of a consensus Afghan government strategy and slow progress to form a negotiation team for intra-Afghan negotiations (IAN) with the Taliban. After significant international pressure, including a decision by the United States to reduce \$1 billion in security assistance to Afghanistan, President Ghani and former Chief Executive Abdullah were able to reach an agreement to resolve their political differences. Additionally, the Afghan government announced the formation of a negotiating team for IAN on March 25.

Terrorist groups also pose a current threat to the stability of Afghanistan. Some of these groups anticipate a future Afghanistan without coalition presence will reduce effective CT pressure, thus emboldening some to build their capabilities to pose a greater threat to the region, and potentially to the West. The Afghanistan-Pakistan border region remains a sanctuary for various groups, including al-Qaida Core (AQ), al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K). Most of these groups focus their attacks within the South Asia region. Although ISIS-K

aspires to attack the West, it likely remains limited to inspiring or enabling solitary attackers there. Terrorist sanctuaries on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border present security challenges for both countries, pose a threat to regional security and stability, and threaten U.S. national security interests. Cross-border attacks periodically strain cross-border relations. During this reporting period, the spread of COVID-19 in the region threatened Afghanistan's limited health and screening systems.

Lastly among current threats to Afghan stability, during this reporting period, the spread of COVID-19 in the region threatened Afghanistan's limited health and screening systems.

The DoD report also provided the following description of the state of the fighting before and after the February 2020 peace agreements. As the italics highlight, it does not indicate which side was winning the war before or after the peace agreements, it shows that the Afghan forces were critically dependent on support from U.S. forces that has now sharply declined, and it warns that the Taliban has cut its attacks on U.S. and allied forces but still sustains high levels of violence against Afghan forces. It is written more as a justification of the peace progress than as an analysis of the war.¹⁸

The United States' vital national interest in Afghanistan is to ensure that Afghan territory is never again used as a safe haven from which terrorists can attack the United States, our Allies, or our interests abroad. Accordingly, the primary objective for Afghanistan under the President's South Asia Strategy is to support a durable political settlement that ends the war and mitigates terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan. The signing of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement and release of the U.S.-Afghanistan Joint Declaration on February 29, 2020 represent significant milestones in U.S. efforts to achieve that objective. The United States agreed to a conditions-based, phased withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan over 14 months if the Taliban abides by its commitment to prevent the use of Afghan territory by terrorists, works to reduce violence, and enters into Intra-Afghan Negotiations (IAN) to determine the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire and reach an agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan. *The first phase of the withdrawal—a reduction to 8,600 troops by July 2020—is complete.*

During the initial portion of the reporting period, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) adjusted its operational approach to intensify pressure on the Taliban to reduce violence and meaningfully participate in IAN. *Since the February 2020 reduction-in-violence (RIV) period, U.S. operations remained focused on counterterrorism operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria—Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) and other terrorist organizations while operations targeting the Taliban have been in defense of the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). A distinct line of effort was added to the campaign plan to enhance ANDSF effectiveness, responsiveness, and overall protection of key Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) infrastructure—specifically provincial centers, highway checkpoints, and the Kabul metropolitan area.* The Combined Situational Awareness Room (CSAR) and supporting Regional Targeting Teams (RTT) established by USFOR-A and the ANDF in early 2019 became fully operational as a cross-security-pillar network to prioritize, resource, and enable ANDSF operations based on a collective understanding of the security environment.

From Spring 2019 until the signing of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement, the CSAR, in concert with a network of Afghan leaders across the GIROA, *degraded Taliban networks by synchronizing personnel, assets, and leader focus at critical points on the battlefield. U.S. and Afghan close-air support of Afghan ground forces provided critical capabilities that enabled offensive and defensive operations.* CSAR integration further enhanced the continued military pressure throughout 2019 and into early 2020, ultimately contributing to the weeklong RIV period in February 2020. The CSAR and RTT network has evolved to facilitate national-level crisis response, expedite intelligence sharing, and conduct broad targeting through predictive analysis to preempt Taliban violence. A Crisis Response Group (CRG) that incorporated this network was established in Kabul as a combined network of coalition and ANDSF personnel with the requisite communications, intelligence, and operational experience to support GIROA's security efforts. *The additional capability provided by these initiatives, coupled with sustained military pressure, contributed to preventing the Taliban from seizing provincial centers in 2019 while denying safe havens for extremist networks targeting coalition homelands.*

During this reporting period, terrorist and insurgent groups continued to present a formidable challenge to Afghan, U.S., and coalition forces. Afghan forces maintain control of Kabul, provincial capitals, major

population centers, most district centers, and most portions of major ground lines of communications (GLOCs). *The Taliban contested several portions of main GLOCs, threatened some district centers, and, in late March, overtook Yamgan District in Badakhshan province. In April, the ANDSF seized the districts of Khamyab and Qarqin in Jowzjan province. Since the February RIV period, the Taliban has sustained high levels of violence against ANDSF checkpoints and convoys. Concurrently, the Taliban has avoided attacks against coalition forces and provincial capitals, likely to avoid risking the U.S.-Taliban Agreement. The current level of violence conducted by the Taliban remains high.*

Throughout this reporting period, *sustained pressure from the ANDSF, coalition forces, and the Taliban degraded ISIS-K through killing fighters and inducing surrenders; this pressure forced ISIS-K to relinquish control of territory in southern Nangarhar Province and in Kunar Province. ISIS-K maintains the ability to conduct mass casualty attacks despite CT pressure from the coalition, the ANDSF, and the Taliban.* Since it was dislodged from territory it controlled, ISIS-K may be moving to smaller groups in urban areas that are more difficult to locate and identify. ISIS-K's effectiveness in these smaller cells will likely be constrained by ANDSF, U.S., Coalition, and Taliban pressure, although it continues to demonstrate the ability to execute HPAs in 2020.

During this reporting period, the ANDSF provided sufficient security to deny the Taliban and ISIS-K their respective objectives. *The Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) and Afghan Air Force (AAF) remain the most capable forces in the ANDSF and continued to demonstrate operational and tactical proficiency. All components of the ANDSF will, however, continue to rely over the long term on contracted logistic support and on the United States for the vast majority of the funding needed to sustain combat operations.* The priority institutional capacity development focus areas for the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) remain ensuring personnel are paid in a timely manner; performing ground vehicle maintenance; procuring and distributing quality food to their forces; maintaining facilities; and managing supplies. Improvements in implementing accountability systems such as the Afghan Personnel and Pay System (APPS), which accounts for and manages payroll for the ANDSF, and Core-IMS, the inventory-management system that inventories and tracks the status of ANDSF equipment and supplies, continued during this reporting period.

The Taliban and the Afghan Government are moving towards the next steps in the peace process. Both sides continue to prepare for IAN, although the start date for IAN has yet to be determined. *The Taliban and the Afghan Government have started releasing prisoners in accordance with the terms of the agreement; however, high levels of Taliban violence and the COVID-19 outbreak in the country continue to hinder efforts to make progress on security and reconciliation.*

Central Government vs. Taliban Control of the Country

The latest DoD report does provide a good description of Afghan forces and a broad description of the U.S. military aid effort. However, the level of detail has been sharply reduced since the report was first issued; the document is now highly political; and it provides little actual data on the course of the fighting, the quality of Afghan forces, and their level of dependence on U.S. train and assist efforts, the Security Force Assistance Brigades, elite U.S. military forces, U.S. provided contractors, U.S. air power, and U.S. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (IS&R) capabilities.

The most it says about which side is winning control of territory is:¹⁹

The Afghan government maintains control of Kabul, provincial capitals, major population centers, most district centers, and most portions of major ground lines of communications (GLOCs). The Taliban contests several portions of main GLOCs, threatening district centers. In late March, the Taliban overtook Yamgan District in Badakhshan province.

This lack of substantive detail is part of a broad pattern of growing over-classification and non-reporting of such data, which now includes performance assessments of Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Ministry of the Interior (MoI), basic Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) strength data and almost all effectiveness data, estimates of central government

versus Taliban control of given districts, Afghan military casualties, and now Enemy Initiated Attack (EIA) data. SIGAR's *April 30, 2020 Quarterly Report* states that,²⁰

This quarter RS restricted from public release its data on enemy-initiated attacks (EIA), an important metric the command uses to track the levels and locations of violence across Afghanistan. This is the first time RS has restricted the release of this data since it began providing it to SIGAR in September 2018. RS explained its decision by saying "EIA are now a critical part of deliberative interagency discussions regarding ongoing political negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban." The Pentagon's Afghanistan policy office added that after the deliberative process ends, the data could again become releasable to the public.

Nevertheless, unclassified reporting to the Congress by the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) and the Lead Inspector General (LIG) do still highlight some key trends in the fighting, as well as the problems within the Afghan forces.²¹

There also are other sources of open source reporting from analysts outside the U.S. government, particularly by the *Long War Journal* (LWJ) and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). The issues involved in generating or interpreting such data are complex, but even a brief overview of such data illustrates just how uncertain the security prospects for a real peace are, and how serious the growing threat from the Taliban was before the peace agreements were even reached.

The very fact so much relevant data is now classified is a warning in itself. Before the resurgence of the Taliban after 2008-2011, official sources provided a wide range of reporting on the changes in the patterns of conflict, central government versus Taliban control, the readiness and effectiveness of Afghan forces, maps of areas where aid workers could safely operate, the effectiveness of the central government in given districts, levels of violence, and the nature of the anti-regime forces. The steady cancellation or over-classification of these data has been a warning that the war has not going been well.

The reasons for this over-classification seem to be largely political. As time went on, official reporting increasingly showed that the Afghan government was not becoming more effective, and that a steadily growing number of Afghan Districts were now disputed or under Taliban control. These negative trends were particularly clear in the reporting on progress in the development of effective Afghan forces and in unclassified official reporting on who controlled given parts of the countryside. As a result, detailed reporting on Afghan force development and reports like United States Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) maps showing which Afghan districts were under government control – ceased to be available, were said to be misleading, or were classified for "security" purposes.

Given the near certain leakage of such data to the Taliban, such classification efforts were clearly more of an effort to "spin" the war by eliminating negative reporting than an effort to classify information for real-world security purposes. In the case of one of the simplest indicators of relative control – maps of central government-controlled districts, Taliban controlled districts, and disputed districts – SIGAR published its last unclassified *Quarterly Report* showing such data in January 30, 2019. It also noted in this report that both the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Resolute Support Command in Afghanistan (RS) had now indicated such reporting was not reliable:²²

...In response to SIGAR's analysis of RS's control data this quarter, DOD said "Measures of population control are not indicative of effectiveness of the South Asia strategy or of progress toward security and stability in Afghanistan, particularly in the wake of the appointment of U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation (SRAR) Zalmay Khalilzad. According to DOD, the [population control]

percentages have varied little since the implementation of the South Asia strategy, which over the last 18 months has slowed Taliban gains made during U.S. drawdowns between 2011 and 2016.

Moreover, typical quarter to quarter variations in these metrics may be due to, among other things, uncertainty in the models that produce them and the assessments that underlie them are to a degree subjective. DOD considers it more important to instead focus on the principal goal of the strategy of concluding the war in Afghanistan on terms favorable to Afghanistan and the United States. More aggressive combat operations by Afghan forces, increased authorities for U.S. forces to conduct supporting strikes, international calls for peace, and the new SRAR's engagements appear to be driving the Taliban to substantive negotiations. Taliban participation in these talks suggests that the Taliban recognize that they cannot advance their interests militarily."

... RS ... commented that "The [South Asia] strategy aims to set conditions for a political resolution to the conflict. One necessary condition is the perception by both sides that the conflict is in a military stalemate. Alternatively, they cannot believe they will attain their goals with continued fighting. Multiple years with little variation in district stability data support multiple years of assessments that the conflict is in a stalemate. Taliban participation in various talks (Russia, U.S. [SRAR], etc.) suggests they have a similar assessment. There is no explanation for Taliban behavior if they are advancing their interest militarily."

SIGAR reported, however, that, ²³

Resolute Support (RS)-reported district-stability data show that as of October 22, 2018, control of Afghanistan's districts, population, and territory became somewhat more contested, Afghan government control or influence continued to decline, and insurgent control or influence increased slightly since July 2018. The percentage of the population in districts under Afghan government control or influence—largely stagnant from May 2017 through July 2018 at around 65%—decreased in October to 63.5%. The Afghan government's control or influence of its districts in October decreased by nearly two percentage points since July to 53.8%... As shown in the box on the left, this quarter, DOD and RS said RS's district-stability data is "not indicative of effectiveness of the South Asia strategy," and reiterated that there is some "uncertainty in models that produce [the data]" and subjectivity in the assessments that underlie it. For more information on how RS assesses government and insurgent control and influence, please see SIGAR's April 2016 Quarterly Report to the United States Congress.

... The Afghan government's control or influence over the population declined this quarter. According to RS, as of October 22, 2018, 63.5% of the population (21.2 millions of an estimated 33.3 million total) lived in areas under Afghan government control or influence, down roughly 500,000 people (and 1.7 percentage points) since the previous quarter. However, this quarter's figure represents a slightly smaller decline (0.6 percentage points) in population under government control or influence compared to the same period in 2017... The insurgency slightly increased its control or influence over area where 10.8% of the population (3.6 million people) lived, a 0.3 percentage point increase since last quarter but a decrease from the 12% reported in October 2017. The population living in contested areas increased to 8.5 million people (25.6% of the population), a nearly two percentage-point increase compared to the same period in 2017.

...According to RS, as of October 22, 2018, there were 219 districts under Afghan government control (74) or influence (145), 53.8% of the total number of districts. This represents a decrease of seven government-controlled or influenced districts compared to last quarter and eight since the same period in 2017. Insurgent control or influence of Afghanistan's districts increased marginally: there were 50 districts under insurgent control (12) or influence (38) this quarter. This is an increase of one district since last quarter, but a decrease of eight compared to the same period in 2017. Therefore, 12.3% of Afghanistan's districts are now reportedly under insurgent control or influence. The number of contested districts—controlled or influenced by neither the Afghan government nor the insurgency—increased by six since last quarter to 138 districts, meaning that 33.9% of Afghanistan's districts are now contested.

Part One and Part Two of Chart One shows the trends in central government versus Taliban control shown in this SIGAR reports, as well as the map of relative control as of October 2018. It shows that the central government and the ANDSF kept control of the main population centers, which were becoming the location of a steadily larger percentage of the population as Afghans fled to the best protected areas. At the same time, these trends reflect a slow but steady loss of

control by district, in spite of massive U.S. aid to Afghan forces, sharp increases in U.S. air strikes in support of the government, and the creation of new Security Force Train and Assist Brigades to help Afghan forces in the field.

These trends do not indicate the central government is decisively losing. *But*, it is clear that it definitely is not winning – in spite of steadily increasing U.S. and allied air strikes and IS&R support, quiet support from elite U.S. combat forces, and the return of train and assist personnel to forward deployed Afghan combat units.

As for popular attitudes, the Asia Foundation public opinion survey for 2019 found that,²⁴

The Global Peace Index now lists Afghanistan as the least peaceful country in the world, replacing Syria...Afghans continue to bear the brunt of the violence, and both ANDSF and civilian casualties continue to be high: Afghan national security advisor...President Ashraf Ghani indicated 45,000 ANDSF had made “the ultimate sacrifice” since he took office in September 2014.³ The Uppsala Conflict Data Program reported 14,000 battle-related deaths in the first half of 2019...and United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented a 27% increase in civilian deaths from the first to the second quarter of 2019...

This grim landscape is reflected by the 74.5% of respondents who say in this year’s Survey they often fear for their personal safety, the highest rate since the Survey began and almost 50% higher than the rate for the same question in 2006 (39.6%)... This represents an increase of over 3 percentage points since 2018 (71.1%). Fear for personal safety has risen every year since 2012, when it was 48.2%. Aside from recent year-on-year increases, the 2019 figure represents an almost 100% increase from the first time the question was asked, in 2006 (39.6%), and a sizeable increase from 2012, when fear for personal safety was at its third-lowest point (48.2%).

Fear when encountering the Taliban (93.1%) is nearly the same as in 2018 (93.6%), as is fear when encountering ISIS/Daesh 95.0% in 2019 compared with 94.9% in 2018. The changes, while marginal, speak to the Taliban’s nationwide reach and increased activity on the one hand, and the more geographically and numerically limited presence of ISIS on the other. The Taliban’s ability to close highways and roads,^{34,35} and incidents involving improvised explosive devices,³⁶ continue to be reflected in this year’s Survey, with 79.9% of respondents reporting some or a lot of fear when traveling from one part of the country to another.

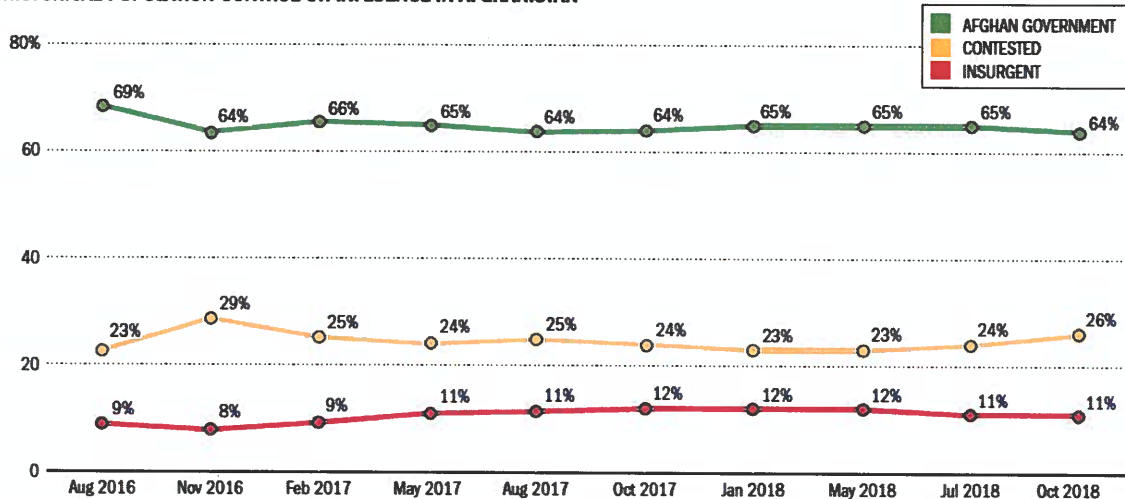
... In an opened ended follow-up, respondents are asked which group poses a threat, the Taliban continue to be the number one response, at 68.9%. The Taliban appear more of a threat in rural areas (75.8%) than urban (37.2%). Disaggregating by ethnicity, the Taliban are most identified as a threat by Hazaras (80.2%) and, while still high, least by Tajiks (61.7%). Interestingly, the percentage of Uzbeks who consider the Taliban a threat is down by almost 6 points from 2018, to 74.4%.

For all of the Taliban’s claims to have popular support, the survey also found that,²⁵

This year, the proportion of respondents who have a lot or a little sympathy with the Taliban is 13.4%, similar to 2018 (15.9%). Respondents who say they have no sympathy with the Taliban have increased almost 3 percentage points, to 85.1%, since 2018 (82.4%). Urban respondents (88.6%) are more inclined than rural respondents (83.9%) to claim to have no sympathy at all. Respondents from Zabul (56.1%) and Uruzgan (50.5%) express the highest levels of sympathy with the Taliban. Despite being the highest, however, sympathy for the Taliban among Zabul respondents is still 20 percentage points lower than the 2018 level of 65.9%.

Chart One - Part One: The Last Major Unclassified Report on Central Government vs. Taliban Control: Trends 2016-2019

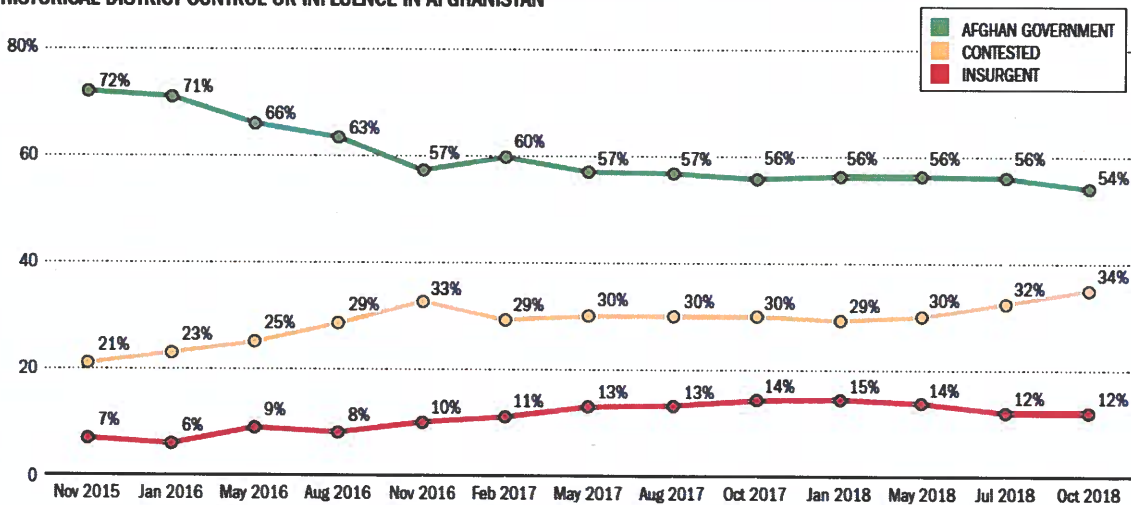
HISTORICAL POPULATION CONTROL OR INFLUENCE IN AFGHANISTAN



Note: Component numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding. Afghan government and insurgent figures include control and influence.

Source: RS, response to SIGAR data call, 8/28/2016, 11/15/2016, 2/20/2017, 5/15/2017, 8/28/2017, 10/15/2017, 3/22/2018, 6/22/2018, 9/19/2018, and 12/20/2018; RS, response to SIGAR vetting, 1/16/2018.

HISTORICAL DISTRICT CONTROL OR INFLUENCE IN AFGHANISTAN



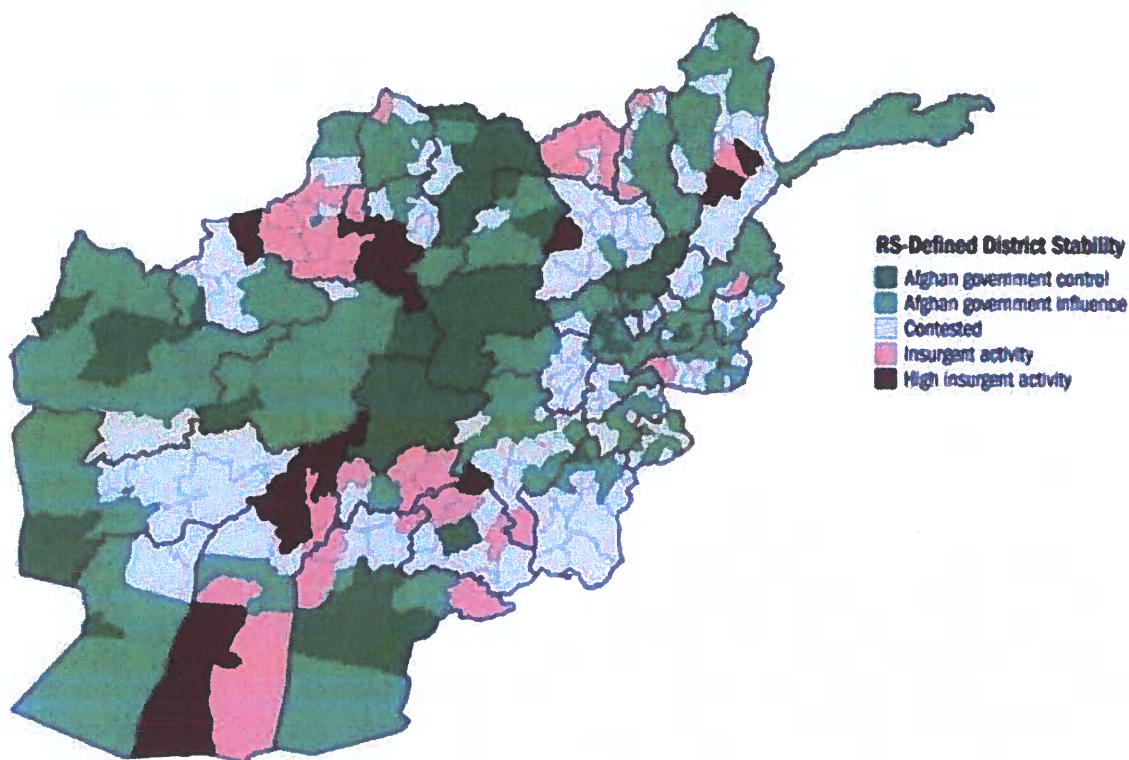
Note: Component numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding. Afghan government and insurgent figures include control and influence.

Source: RS, response to SIGAR data call, 11/27/2015, 1/29/2016, 5/28/2016, 8/28/2016, 11/15/2016, 2/20/2017, 5/15/2017, 8/28/2017, 10/15/2017, 3/22/2018, 6/22/2018, 9/19/2018, and 12/20/2018; RS, response to SIGAR vetting, 1/16/2018.

Source: SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to Congress*, January 30, 2019, p. 70.

Chart One - Part Two: The Last Major Unclassified Report on Central Government vs. Taliban Control: District Control as of October 22, 2018

STABILITY LEVEL OF AFGHANISTAN'S 407 DISTRICTS AS OF OCTOBER 22, 2018



Note: A district is assigned its district-stability level based on the overall trend of land-area/population control of each district as a whole.

Source: RS, response to SIGAR data call, 12/20/2018.

GOVERNMENT AND INSURGENT CONTROL WITHIN AFGHANISTAN AS OF OCTOBER 2018						
Control Status	Districts		Population		Territory	
	Number	%	In Millions	%	Sq Km	%
GOVERNMENT						
Control	74	18%	11.3	34%	104,000	16%
Influence	145	36%	9.9	30%	258,000	40%
CONTESTED	138	34%	8.5	26%	171,000	27%
INSURGENT						
Control	12	3%	0.6	2%	40,000	6%
Influence	38	9%	3.0	9%	71,000	11%
Total	407	100%	33.3	100%	644,000	100%

Note: Sq Km = square kilometers. Component numbers may not add to 100 because of rounding. Territory figures have been rounded by RS.

Source: SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to Congress*, January 30, 2019, pp. 71-72.

Removing these data from open source reporting removed a major source of embarrassment regarding the trends in the fighting – although few in Afghanistan and in the media were unaware of the fact that Afghan forces were slowly losing the battle in the countryside. And, the process of over-classification continued – as did efforts to find open source metrics that would be more reassuring and positive.

As noted earlier, SIGAR stated in its *April 30, 2020 Report to Congress* that the Resolute Support command classified yet another indicator of which side was winning, and it still continues to classify many other data on ANDSF manning and effectiveness.²⁶ SIGAR also noted that other reports did show growing Taliban activity continued in a number of areas, stating,²⁷

...Between March 1 and 31, the Taliban refrained from attacks against Coalition forces; however they increased attacks against ANDSF to levels above seasonal norms. The Afghan Government maintains control of Kabul, provincial capitals, major population centers, most district centers, and most portions of major ground lines of communications (GLOCs). The Taliban contest several portions of main GLOCs, contest district centers in vicinity of Taliban strongholds, and in late March overtook Yamgan District, Badakhshan. Risking the United States-Taliban agreement...

Over-classification scarcely concealed the developing facts on the ground. Outside media and analytic reporting during 2019 indicated that the Taliban continued to gain control of territory relative to the ANDSF and the Afghan central government. Such reporting also indicated that the central government was becoming a government whose forces increasingly concentrated on controlling major population centers – and that the central government was becoming more of a government of “Kabulistan” than a government of Afghanistan.

At the same time, both SIGAR and *Long War Journal* (LWJ) reporting continued to indicate that the trends in the various metrics that compared the Afghan central government’s level of control with that of the Taliban steadily favored the Taliban after the withdrawal of most U.S. combat troops at the end of 2014.

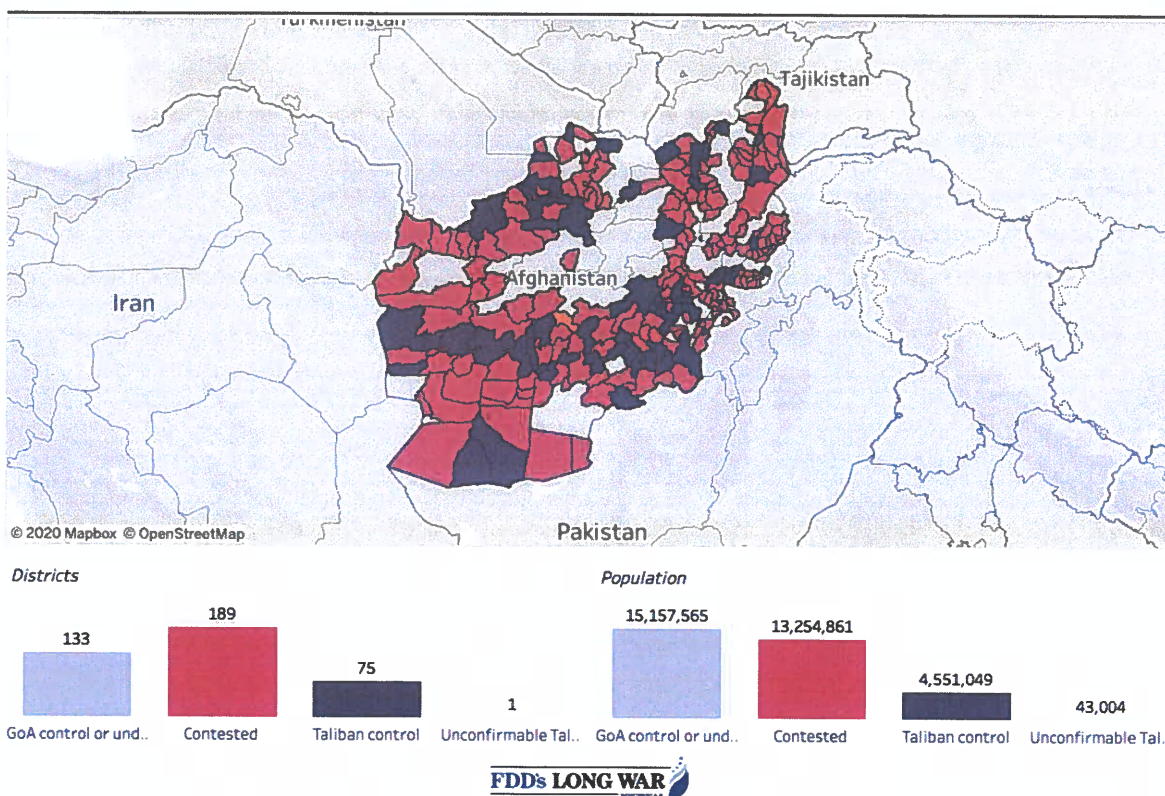
Moreover, the term “government control” has always been all too relative. There are many areas that have been under the effective control of power brokers, drug lords, and warlords rather than the central government – and where it is unclear that any compromise of a political agreement at the top between the Ghani and the Abdullah Abdullah factions would necessarily affect areas under local power brokers if they opposed the terms of a peace.²⁸

The *Long War Journal* continued to track and estimate the current patterns in central government versus Taliban control of the districts in Afghanistan in spite of the fact that the official version of such data had become classified.²⁹ This LWJ mapping effort is illustrated in **Chart Two**, which presents the map shown on the LWJ website in April 2020. This LWJ map found that the Afghan central government controlled some 15.2 million people – largely in urban areas – while the Taliban controlled 4.6 million Afghans and contested control of 13.3 million. It shows that the central government controlled 133 districts, while the Taliban controlled 75 districts and contested control of 189.

It should be noted that the *Long War Journal* map shown in **Chart Two** does not have an “as of date” – and that the LWJ no longer can draw on official sources. However, the LWJ methodology and its limits are well described in the article presenting the map, and the map does seem to provide as good of a picture of the balance just before the peace agreements that is available in open sources. The data in the maps also track closely with the unsourced map of Taliban control shown in **Chart Three**, which is taken from a *New York Times* article dated December 9, 2020. Both also

reflect major Taliban gains relative to the earlier map in **Chart One**, which shows a much more favorable estimate for the Afghan central government.

Chart Two: Long War Journal Map of Government vs. Taliban Control of Afghanistan

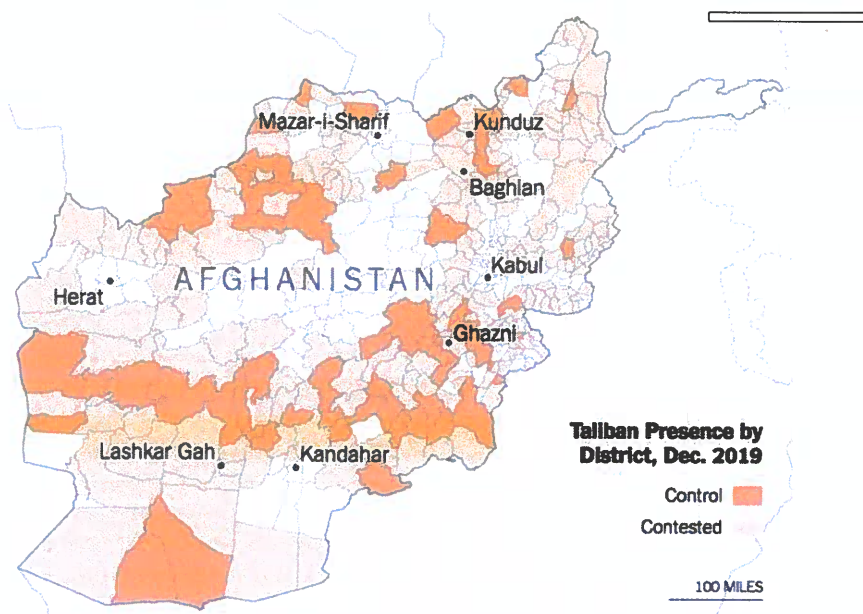


FDD's Long War Journal has been tracking the Taliban's attempts to gain control of territory since NATO ended its military mission in Afghanistan and switched to an "advise and assist" role in June 2014. Districts have been retaken (by both sides) only to be lost shortly thereafter, largely resulting in the conflict's current relative stalemate. However, since the U.S. drawdown of peak forces in 2011, the Taliban has unquestionably been resurgent.

The primary data and research behind this are based on open-source information, such as press reports and information provided by government agencies and the Taliban. This is a living map that LWJ frequently updates as verifiable research is conducted to support control changes. Any "Unconfirmed" district colored orange 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.

Source: Bill Roggio & Alexandra Gutowski, "Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, FDD's *Long War Journal*, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/mapping-taliban-control-in-afghanistan>.

Chart Three: New York Times Map of Government vs. Taliban Control of Afghanistan as of December 2019



Source: Sarah Almukhtar and Rod Norland, "What Did the U.S. Get for \$2 Trillion in Afghanistan?," *New York Times*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/09/world/middleeast/afghanistan-war-cost.html?referringSource=articleShare>.

***Enemy Initiated Attacks (EIA): A Nearly Meaningless and Now
Classified Metric***

Somewhat ironically, another set of metrics that were originally generated to show positive trends has also recently been classified. This is the number of Enemy Initiated attacks (EIA) and Effective Enemy Initiated attacks (EEIA), which are significant attacks initiated by insurgents and significant attacks initiated by insurgents that result in casualties, respectively.

Issuing such metrics became typical of the efforts to find ways of providing more positive reports regardless of their analytic merit – but only as long as they seemed to show the Taliban was not winning. SIGAR reports that the U.S., NATO, and the Afghan government classified such reporting on enemy initiated attacks (EIA) after January 1, 2020, and explains that,³⁰

This quarter RS restricted from public release its data on enemy-initiated attacks (EIA), an important metric the command uses to track the levels and locations of violence across Afghanistan. This is the first time RS has restricted the release of this data since it began providing it to SIGAR in September 2018. RS explained its decision by saying “EIA are now a critical part of deliberative interagency discussions regarding ongoing political negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban.” The Pentagon’s Afghanistan policy office added that after the deliberative process ends, the data could again become releasable to the public. RS did provide the following unclassified narrative about enemy-initiated attacks during the month of March:

Between March 1 and 31, the Taliban refrained from attacks against Coalition forces; however they increased attacks against ANDSF to levels above seasonal norms. The Afghan Government maintains control of Kabul, provincial capitals, major population centers, most district centers, and most portions of major ground lines of communications (GLOCs). The Taliban contest several portions of main GLOCs, contest district centers in vicinity of Taliban strongholds, and in late March overtook Yamgan District, Badakhshan. Since the [RIV] period, the Taliban reduced violence against ANDSF in provincial capitals, likely to avoid risking the United States-Taliban agreement.

From an analytic viewpoint, this example of classification was not much of a loss. To be blunt, it is unclear that these EIA and EEIA metrics ever meant anything without far more supporting data and detailed trend mapping than was ever provided in issuing. Moreover, the *LIG Quarterly Report* was still able to provide data on enemy initiated attacks from 2015 through the end of 2019. These data are shown in **Chart Four**, along with recent data patterns in civilian casualties.

The LIG reported on these metrics as follows:

USFOR-A defines enemy-initiated attacks as attacks by the Taliban, ISIS-K, or other enemy groups. An enemy-initiated attack is labeled as effective if it results in a casualty (a person killed or wounded) there were 8,204 enemy-initiated attacks last quarter, and 3,027 of those were effective enemy-initiated attacks. While the number of attacks in the last 3 months of 2019 decreased from the prior quarter, as is typical for the winter months, it was still the second-highest number since OFS began in 2015.³¹

Previous Lead IG reports have included USFOR-A data on the number of “enemy-initiated attacks” and “effective” enemy-initiated attacks in Afghanistan...However, this quarter USFOR-A withheld this data from public release, stating the information on enemy-initiated attacks is “now a critical part of deliberative interagency discussions regarding ongoing political negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban.” The DoD told the DoD OIG in early May that the U.S. Government was using the data in its deliberations over whether the Taliban is abiding by the terms of the agreement. The DoD stated that once the deliberations are complete, the attack data can be released to the public.³²

In addition, SIGAR reported that, ³³

Enemy attacks in Afghanistan increased considerably in late 2019, according to data from RS. September 2019, the month of the Afghan presidential election, saw the highest number of enemy-initiated attacks in any month since June 2012 and the highest number of effective enemy-initiated attacks since recording began in January 2010. This level of violence continued after the presidential election. October 2019 had the second

highest number of enemy-initiated attacks in any month since July 2013.... both overall enemy-initiated attacks and effective enemy-initiated attacks during the fourth quarter of 2019 exceeded same-period levels in every year since recording began in 2010. However... while the number of overall and effective attacks increased this quarter, the proportion of overall attacks that were effective was similar to the same period in 2018... When looking at 2019 as a whole, enemy attacks appeared to decline early in the year while peace talks were ongoing. But a turbulent last six months resulted in increases in overall enemy attacks (6%) and effective attacks (4%) in 2019 compared to the already high levels reported in 2018... The geographic distribution of enemy activity remained largely consistent from 2018 to 2019....in 2019 heavy fighting continued in southern and western Afghanistan. However, enemy activity increased and spread into larger areas of the north and east.

The SIGAR maps in **Chart Five** do provide a somewhat more useful form of EIA/EEIA reporting than simply showing total numbers. Mapping the growth in Taliban activity at least reveals something about whether it is winning. The results also bear a close resemblance to the LWJ map in **Chart Two**. *The practical problem is that there is no indication of what the impact of successful or unsuccessful enemy-initiated attacks were on control of the country, the peace process, or the Taliban's perceptions of who is winning the war. There are no reports on other attacks, actual Taliban defeats, Afghan National Defense Security Force initiated attacks, and whether any of these attacks were successful or what they accomplished.*

The problem with EIA and EEIA statistics is that they have never really measured who is winning or losing. At best, they measure tactical encounters. They do not show whether the end result really matters, and they do not measure the success of a rebel force in gaining control of the population or territory. They also do not measure the fact that many such encounters may have a political, rather than tactical objective, largely because of U.S. and allied support of ANDSF forces. In practice, such numbers seem to have been issued because on a surface level, they implied the central government was more successful, and could then be "spun" to give a more favorable picture of the war.

Finally, a third set of maps by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) is shown in **Chart Six**. These maps are taken from an ACLED analysis entitled *The World According to the Taliban: New Data on Afghanistan*. They have an "as of" date of December 19, 2019.

The maps compare the claims made regarding acts of violence by the Taliban's news service, *The Voice of Jihad*, with the independent estimates of ACLED. They do not focus on control of territory or total EIAs/EEIAs, but rather on levels of Taliban violence in a given area. As such, they provide considerable insight into the level of Taliban activity in many areas of the country before the peace agreements were signed. They also show patterns that roughly correlate to the areas of control shown in **Chart Two** and **Chart Three**, and they highlight the practical problems throughout Afghanistan in negotiating and enforcing a peace settlement once (and if) such a settlement is reached.

The ACLED data also illustrate the challenges in making such estimates. SIGAR shifted to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reporting in its April 2019 *Quarterly Report* and substituted maps and other data from ACLED for the previous data it had gotten from DoD and the Resolute Support Command (RS).

It described ACLED's effort as "a disaggregated conflict collection, analysis, and crisis-mapping project" funded by the State Department. The project collects the dates, actors, types of violence, locations, and fatalities of all political violence, protest, and select non-violent, politically important events across several regions, as reported from open, secondary sources. ACLED's aim

is to capture the modes, frequency, and intensity of political violence and opposition as it occurs. ACLED considers the event data it collects as falling into three categories “violent events,” “demonstrations,” or “nonviolent actions. Within these categories, ACLED codes their events as: (1) Battles, (2) Explosions/ Remote Violence, (3) Protests, (4) Riots (5) Strategic Developments, and (6) Violence against Civilians.”³⁴

The data in **Chart Six** do, however, show that ACLED found that there were major differences between its estimates of levels of violence and the Taliban’s estimates. It describes its new analysis as follows, and this raises additional issues about the value of the EIA/EEIA data shown earlier:

Taliban forces maintain control in some areas of Afghanistan, while other armed groups – such as the Islamic State – are increasingly complicating the conflict landscape and making inroads across the country (ACLED, 2018).

To better represent the ground reality of this complex and enormous conflict, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) has supplemented coverage of Afghanistan with over 21,000 additional events sourced from Voice of Jihad (VOJ), a website and news service run by the Taliban. The addition of Voj as a source for Afghanistan more than doubles the number of political violence and protest events in ACLED’s Afghanistan dataset (see map below), offering more nuanced insight into the conflict landscape.

... Being run by one of the parties to the conflict, Voj is obviously not a neutral source of information. What makes the source particularly useful in the Afghan context, however, is that information provided by Voj is often not reported elsewhere. The combination of the conflict’s complexity with the country’s rough terrain makes coverage in certain areas by traditional media largely impossible — which is why many of the journalists active in Afghanistan also rely on Voj for information (for example: Pajhwok, 7 May 2019; Afghan Islamic Press, 19 April 2019; New York Times, 15 May 2018; Pajhwok, 3 September 2019; RFERL, 7 June 2013; Washington Post, 9 September 2019; Long War Journal, 23 August 2018).

Analytically, Voj data give a more complete picture of the Taliban’s situational circumstances, in particular lending unique awareness of where the group may operate support zones and maintain areas of strength and lower-scale activity. Such insight increases both the scope and the quality of the ACLED situational overview of Afghanistan. Given the Taliban is a conflict party, and reports from a conflict party come with many biases, additional steps are taken in ACLED’s coding process to ensure the reliability of these data... The addition of information from Voj has more than doubled ACLED’s Afghanistan dataset, from fewer than 20,000 events to over 40,000 (see diagram below). Coverage extends from 1 January 2017 through the present.

VOJ’s coverage expands beyond events in which the Taliban were directly involved, though a large majority involve the Taliban as either a primary or secondary actor. Of the more than 34,000 events which involve the Taliban since the start of 2017, nearly two-thirds come from Voj. Unsurprisingly, the top authority on the Taliban is the Taliban itself.

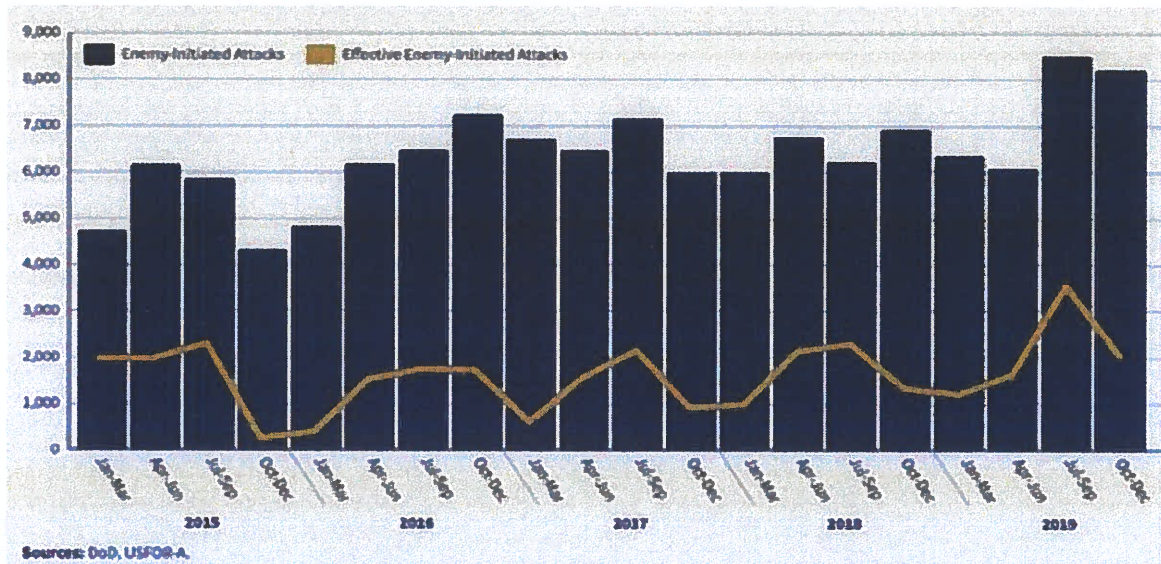
Similar to other sources covering the conflict in Afghanistan, Voj reports a majority (roughly two-thirds) of events as battles, especially those with no exchange of territory. Where Voj varies is in its emphasis on coverage of remote violence involving explosives (see figure below), as well as its coverage of events it claims are perpetrated by the Taliban. This is unsurprising: conflict actors typically have an incentive to appear strong and will emphasize reporting which corroborates this image. Relatedly, Voj reports zero events in which the government retook territory, while other sources (including the Afghan Ministry of Defense [MOD]) report over 250 such events. This again indicates a reluctance on the part of the Taliban to report losses.

The full text of the ACLED analysis – entitled *The World According to the Taliban: New Data on Afghanistan* is available at <https://acleddata.com/2019/12/19/the-world-according-to-the-taliban-new-data-on-afghanistan/>. This ACLED reporting does provide some of the best-sourced and defined descriptions of such data available, as well as descriptions of some of the key differences between sources and methods of analysis. It also provides a very tangible picture of how difficult it may be to secure a peace – given the dispersal of Taliban attacks and forces.

Most importantly, the data in **Chart Six** again warn that the Afghan forces were in serious trouble even with the massive U.S. air and ground support that will now be withdrawn as part of the peace process.

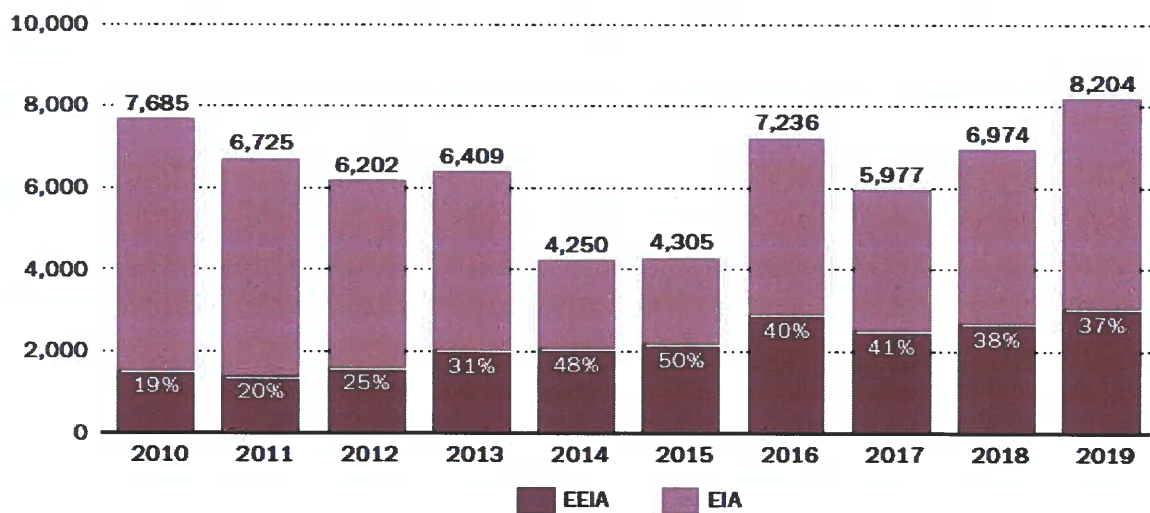
Chart Four: Enemy-Initiated Attacks, January 2015 through December 2019

LIG Estimates of Enemy Initiated Attacks



SIGAR Estimates of Enemy Initiated Attacks (EIAs) and Effective Enemy Initiated Attacks (EEIAs)

FOURTH-QUARTER ENEMY-INITIATED ATTACKS SINCE 2010

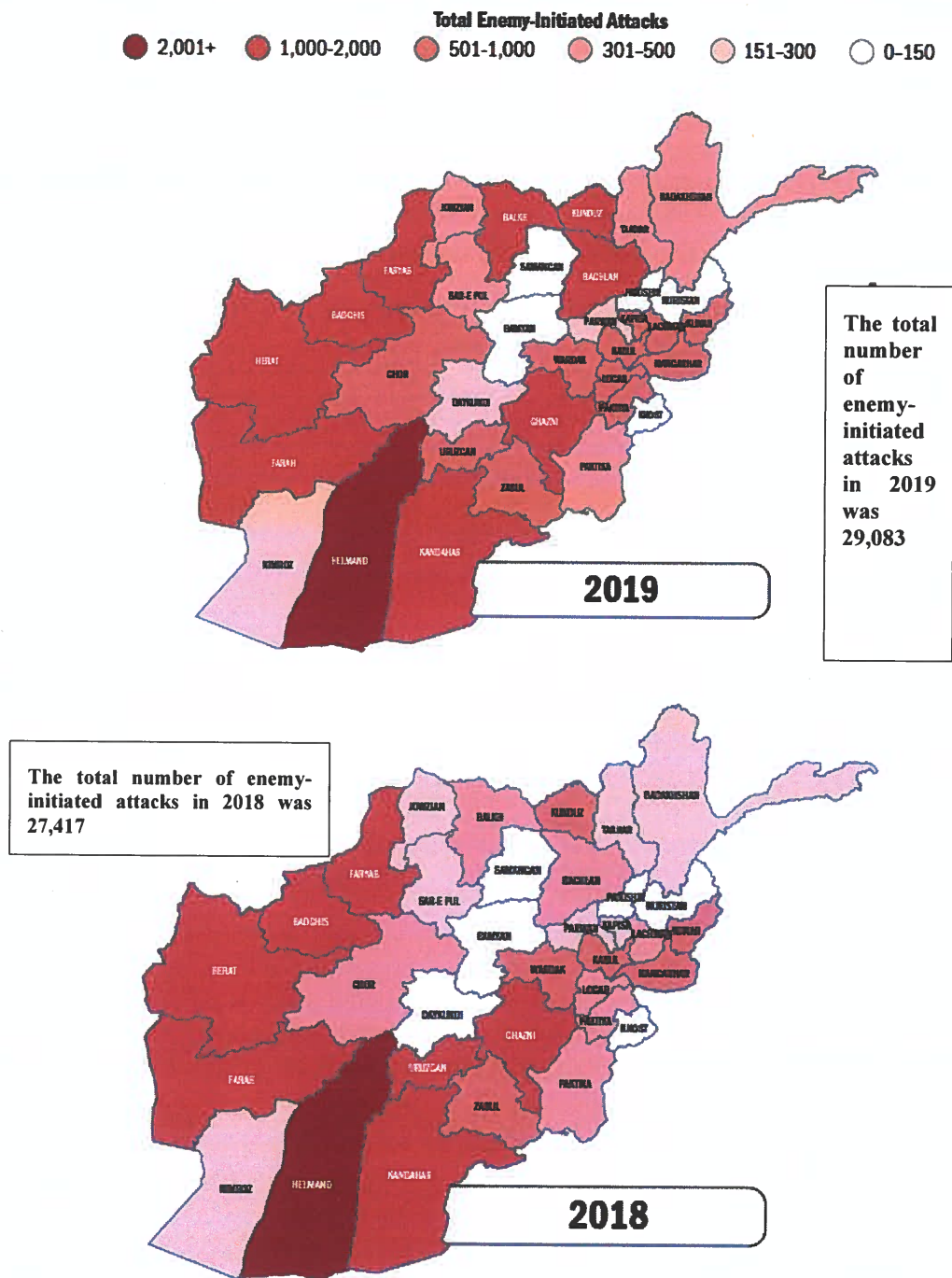


Note: EIA = Enemy-Initiated Attacks, EEIA = Effective Enemy-Initiated Attacks.

Source: RS, response to SIGAR data call 1/7/2020; SIGAR, analysis of RS-provided data, 1/2020.

Source: LIG, pp. 20-21; SIGAR, p. 68.

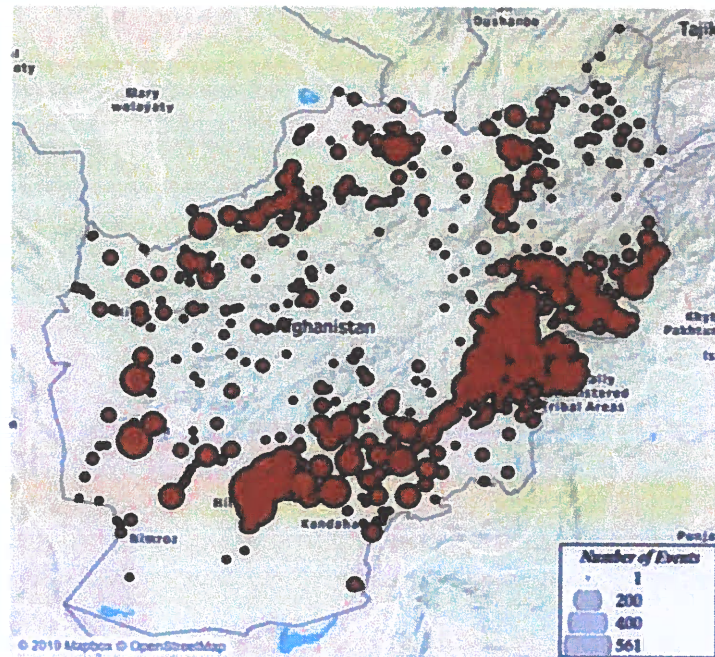
Chart Five: SIGAR Map of Enemy Initiated Attacks: 2018 versus 2019



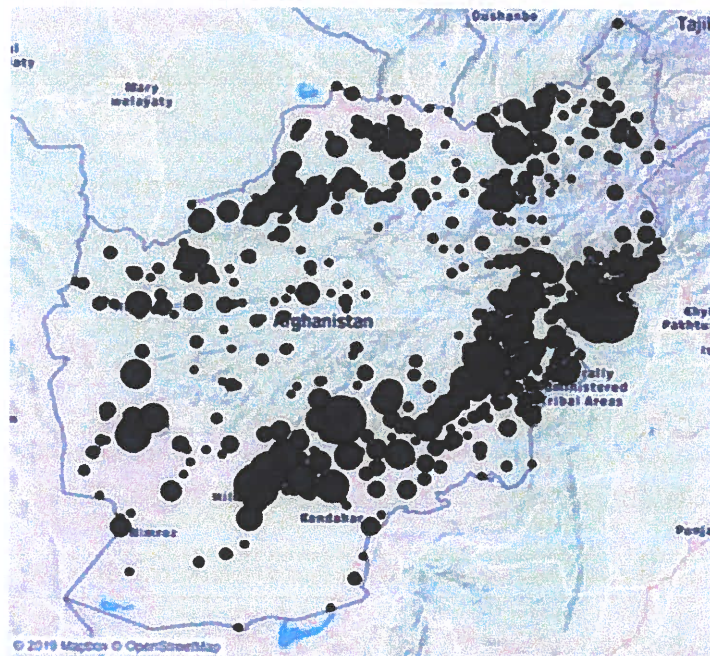
Source: RS, response to SIGAR data call, January 7, 2020; SIGAR analysis of RS-provided data, January 2020; SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to Congress*, April 30, 2020, p. 69.

Chart Six: ACLED vs. Taliban Estimate of Violent Events in Afghanistan

Events sourced from VOJ



Events sourced from other sources



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), *The World According to the Taliban: New Data on Afghanistan*, December 19, 2019, <https://acleddata.com/2019/12/19/the-world-according-to-the-taliban-new-data-on-afghanistan/>.

Combat with the Taliban Does Continue

As has been described earlier, the post-Peace agreement trends in combat are important largely because they show the Taliban remains active against Afghan central government forces. There has been some reduction in these levels of violence since the peace agreements were signed, but so far, the peace agreements with the Taliban and the efforts to reduce violence have only had a mixed impact. USFOR-A sources report civilian casualties are down, but UN reports and other media reports indicate that civilian casualties may not have declined – while Afghan military casualties are still classified. Taliban attacks also continued in April 2020, in spite of the steady rise in Coronavirus cases and the efforts to strengthen the agreement to reduce violence.³⁵

Part of this continuing Taliban violence may be a reaction to the Afghan central government's failure to fully implement the prisoner exchange program called for in the February 29, 2020, peace agreements, but another part seems to be the result of an ongoing effort to preserve the Taliban's military options and keep military pressure up on the Afghan forces.

In any case, the April 2020 SIGAR *Quarterly Report* sounded a clear warning that the fighting is not over,³⁶

This quarter RS restricted from public release its data on enemy-initiated attacks (EIA), an important metric the command uses to track the levels and locations of violence across Afghanistan. This is the first time RS has restricted the release of this data since it began providing it to SIGAR in September 2018. RS explained its decision by saying "EIA are now a critical part of deliberative interagency discussions regarding ongoing political negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban." The Pentagon's Afghanistan policy office added that after the deliberative process ends, the data could again become releasable to the public...

RS's statement about the violence level from March 1–31 corresponds with the publicly available data from open sources. The New York Times reported on March 4 that Taliban violence against the ANDSF had increased after the signing of the U.S.-Taliban agreement, as they conducted 76 attacks across 24 Afghan provinces in four days. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), partly funded by the State Department, attributed 538 violent incidents to the Taliban from March 1–31, a 42% increase in incidents compared to February 2020 (which included the RIV week), and an 11% increase compared to March 2019. TOLO news also reported an increase in Taliban attacks following the signing of the U.S.-Taliban agreement (31–96 attacks per day between March 3 and April 7 versus around 70 attacks per day before the RIV), though they did not indicate the source of their data...

After concluding that there had been no post-agreement reduction in Taliban attacks, on March 19, Afghanistan's Acting Minister of Defense Asadullah Khalid ordered MOD forces "to return to [an] active defense position from [a] defensive position," meaning they had "the right to attack the enemy where they are preparing to attack."...As Taliban attacks on the ANDSF continued into early April, a USFOR-A spokesperson reported that General Miller met with Taliban leadership in Doha on April 10 and 13 "as part of the military channel established in the agreement ... about the need to reduce the violence."

So did the LIG report for the first quarter of 2020:³⁷

Violence in Afghanistan at the beginning of the quarter was high, in part because U.S. forces exerted "military pressure" on the Taliban "to create the conditions for a political settlement," according to U.S. Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR-A) ... According to media reports, the Taliban similarly increased its activity to strengthen its negotiating position... The United States and Taliban agreed to a 1-week reduction in violence as a precondition of the signing of the agreement...

However, both during the reduction in violence and after the signing of the agreement, the Taliban continued attacks against Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). In the final 2 weeks of the quarter alone, the Taliban launched more than 300 attacks, with major assaults in several provinces, with the insurgents seizing territory and inflicting heavy ANDSF casualties, according to media sources. USFOR-A told the DoD OIG that U.S. military operations remained focused on defending the ANDSF throughout the quarter.

Insider attacks by ANDSF personnel—or Taliban infiltrators—targeting the ANDSF continued this quarter, following the growing trend since 2008.¹¹ USFOR-A reported that there were 17 insider attacks that targeted the ANDSF, killing 48 ANDSF members and wounding 6.¹² USFOR-A reported that there was one insider attack this quarter that resulted in the death of U.S. service members. On February 8, a gunman wearing an ANDSF uniform opened fire, killing two U.S. personnel and one Afghan in Nangarhar province.

...the Taliban ramped up attacks against the ANDSF almost immediately after signing this agreement. The Taliban declared that ANDSF forces were not off-limits, and Taliban levels of violence escalated throughout Afghanistan, raising questions as to the future of the agreement...In addition, as the quarter ended, the Afghan government and the Taliban remained in dispute regarding the speed and size of prisoner releases, as well as the levels of violence in the country, and the intra-Afghan negotiations were on hold. Further complicating the intra-Afghan negotiations was the political impasse and the coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

...General Austin Miller, commander of USFOR-A and Resolute Support, stated in a Twitter message posted by his spokesman at the beginning of March that the “United States has been very clear about our expectations—the violence must remain low.”...The Taliban stated that the reduction in violence was not a ceasefire and continued some attacks against the ANDSF.

News media reports stated that the Taliban said it would not attack major military facilities or cities, but it would attack convoys and rural areas....On March 2, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid stated to the media that the “reduction in violence...has ended now and our operations will continue as normal,” and, according to media reports, Taliban attacks on Afghan government targets resumed.

On March 23, Secretary Pompeo stated that “the reduction in violence is real [albeit] not perfect,” and that there had been no attacks on U.S. forces since the agreement was signed. U.S. officials stated that the violence levels were too high and that they could jeopardize the U.S.-Taliban agreement if they continued. DoS officials did not state to the DoS OIG what level of violence would jeopardize the agreement...

A U.S. official quoted in the media stated that the Taliban leadership had sufficient command and control of their fighters to implement a ceasefire if they chose to do so....Taliban attacks continued even amid international appeals for a ceasefire on humanitarian grounds to slow the spread of COVID-19 across the country...According to media reporting, in the final 2 weeks of March, the Taliban launched more than 300 attacks, with major assaults in the provinces of Kunduz, Faryab, and Badakhshan, where the insurgents seized territory and inflicted heavy ANDSF casualties.

The LIG also reported that the Taliban has kept up a pattern of high-profile attacks in Kabul, again demonstrating that it remains a major threat in a highly visible way without necessarily violating the peace agreements while also creating a major incentive for the U.S. to slow its withdrawals.³⁸

Resolute Support defines a high-profile attack as an incident that involves a suicide bomber or vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED). According to the DoD’s December 2019 semiannual report to Congress on Afghanistan, Afghan and international forces have prioritized preventing high-profile attacks in Kabul, particularly after a truck bomb attack in May 2017 that killed approximately 150 people. The DoD stated that the Taliban and ISIS-K conduct high-profile attacks in Kabul because they “attract media attention, create the perception of widespread insecurity, and undermine the legitimacy of the Afghan government.”

USFOR-A reported two high-profile attacks in Kabul during the quarter. On February 11, a suicide bomber detonated outside of a military academy in Kabul, killing 6 and wounding 12, according to news sources. Two of those killed in the attack were civilians and the other four were military personnel. No group claimed responsibility for the attack. According to USFOR-A, the second high-profile attack occurred March 6. News sources reported that ISIS-K conducted a coordinated attack on a Shia gathering, killing 32 and wounding at least 80. Former Chief Executive Abdullah was one of those in attendance at the gathering but escaped unharmed.

Another notable attack occurred in Kabul on March 25, but it did not qualify as a high-profile attack under Resolute Support’s criteria. According to news sources, ISIS-K took responsibility for a single gunman’s attack on a Sikh and Hindu temple in Kabul during a morning worship ceremony. The attack killed 25 civilians and wounded 8; Afghan security forces successfully rescued 80 additional civilians from the temple after an hours-long battle.

A letter from the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team to the Chair of the UN Security Council Committee dated April 30, 2020, sounded similar warnings about the peace agreements and made it clear that the Taliban did see their side to be winning. Several key passages make this clear:

...Early indications are that many, if not all, of these objectives will prove challenging. 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 hardline. 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.³⁹

...A key Taliban member of the Political Office in Doha, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai Padshah Khan (TAi.067), explained to the media on 29 February that, as from the end of March, the war between the Taliban and the United States would cease. There was no mention of the Taliban war against Afghan Forces or the Government of Afghanistan. This message from the Taliban leadership was echoed by Taliban commanders in the field who informed civilian populations that, following the “victory of the Islamic Emirate”, the “Afghan Government would be toppled within three months”.⁸ Hopes for a continuation of the reduction in violence were dampened shortly after the signing ceremony as Taliban forces increased attacks against Afghan Forces countrywide.⁴⁰

...The Taliban remain confident that they can take power by force. The risk exists that they will continue to find reasons to delay intra-Afghan negotiations as international forces supporting the Government of Afghanistan continue to leave. Delaying tactics would include the argument that the authorities in Kabul are not abiding by the agreement regarding prisoner releases or refusing to acknowledge any negotiating team put forward by Kabul. The Taliban have already begun accusing the United States of bad faith when it provides close air support to Afghan Forces while under Taliban attack. Similarly, the delay in the formation of the Government in Kabul, after a prolonged election process, also presented a challenge for the implementation of the agreement. Despite the challenges, Member States continue to believe that a negotiated settlement is the only solution to the long-protracted conflict in Afghanistan.⁴¹

...the Taliban leaders have steered the movement through negotiations with the United States to conclude an agreement. The process has increased their political leverage and access to some Member States and international media, while they were simultaneously carrying out increased levels of attacks.⁹ Throughout, the Taliban have managed to stay unified, despite internal divergences of view.⁴²

... The Taliban have issued no announcement of a spring offensive for 2020 yet, possibly indicating that the group wishes to display some moderation in the face of international and national pressure to reach a peace agreement with the Government of Afghanistan. It is possible that the decision has been affected by the current COVID-19 pandemic, whose eventual effects on military operations are not yet clear.⁴³

Unlike the U.S. and NATO command, the UN team also found that counting the control of districts was another key indicator, although its count did reflect at least one positive trend,⁴⁴

The Monitoring Team was informed that control of 50 to 60 per cent of Afghan territory was contested between the Taliban and government forces during the reporting period. There are 21 districts currently reported to be under full Taliban control, down from between 25 and 30 districts in the previous reporting period (see S/2019/481, para. 16). The continued goal of the Taliban over consecutive fighting seasons to capture and hold a provincial capital remains difficult for the group given the continued presence of international military close air support. The sudden or unexpected withdrawal of such support would endanger several provinces and leave them susceptible to falling to the Taliban.

As has been described earlier, these trends had not changed as of July 1, 2020. The Taliban generally did not attack U.S. targets in the months that followed, but the Afghan National Security Council reported that Taliban attacks rose nearly 40% in the previous three months compared with the same period last year.⁴⁵ The Taliban have, however, refrained from publicizing them to avoid

U.S. condemnation.⁴⁶ The Taliban continues to target and kill religious scholars, Afghan prosecutors, cultural figures, and human rights workers. In an already unstable agreement to withdraw U.S. presence for assurance of a Taliban-agreed negotiation, it is becoming apparent that violence is not decreasing, and if anything, the Taliban is taking advantage of reduced U.S. troop numbers.

Similarly, the Department of Defense 1225 report issued at the end of June 2020 states that,

...Since the February RIV period, the Taliban has sustained high levels of violence against ANDSF checkpoints and convoys. Concurrently, the Taliban has avoided attacks against coalition forces and provincial capitals, likely to avoid risking the U.S.-Taliban Agreement. The current level of violence conducted by the Taliban remains high.⁴⁷

Since the February 22-28 RIV period, the Taliban has sustained high levels of violence against ANDSF checkpoints and convoys. Concurrently, the Taliban has avoided attacks against coalition forces and provincial capitals, likely to avoid risking the U.S.-Taliban Agreement. ...From December 1, 2019 to April 30, 2020, violence levels in Afghanistan fluctuated in response to progress in the peace process. There were three distinct periods of violence during this reporting period: 1) Pre-RIV; 2) During RIV; and 3) Post US-Taliban Agreement.⁴⁸

1. Pre-RIV (December 1, 2019 - February 21, 2020): Before the 7-day RIV period in late February, the Taliban increased operations. Violence levels were elevated during this period and were above historical norms.
2. During RIV (February 22-28): From February 22-28, all sides implemented a weeklong RIV and the Taliban demonstrated the ability to control the levels of violence. During the weeklong RIV, the levels of violence were significantly lower than historical norms.
3. Post U.S.-Taliban Agreement (February 29-June 1): The U.S.-Taliban Agreement that was signed on February 29 included commitments to seek to continue reducing violence in Afghanistan. After the agreement was signed, however, violence levels increased above historical norms, though lethality remained below historical norms. The elevated violence level was possibly an attempt to gain leverage during prisoner release discussions and IAN. There were no Taliban attacks against Coalition forces, though there were several provincial center attacks at the end of the reporting period.

The Taliban and Haqqani Network very likely maintain the capability to conduct explosive and other offensive operations against Afghan and Coalition forces. At the beginning of the reporting period, Taliban offensive operations briefly decreased during the weeklong RIV in February 2020. Since the U.S.-Taliban Agreement was signed, the Taliban has reduced violence against Coalition forces, but has continued its offensive operations against the ANDSF and Afghan government officials. The Taliban is calibrating its use of violence to harass and undermine the ANDSF and GIROA but remain at a level it perceives is within the bounds of the agreement, probably to encourage a U.S. troop withdrawal and set favorable conditions for a post-withdrawal Afghanistan. For example, the Taliban captured the Yamgan district center in Badakhshan on March 29.⁴⁹

The Taliban has sustained levels of violence five times higher than those observed during the RIV period. U.S. Government Departments and Agencies continue to closely monitor violence levels in Afghanistan and assess whether the Taliban is sufficiently complying with its commitments under the U.S.-Taliban Agreement. The U.S. Government expects the Taliban to fulfill its commitments under the Agreement, which specifically states that withdrawal of troops below 8,600 will happen "With the commitment and action on the obligations" by the Taliban of their part of the agreement.⁵⁰

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So far, the Taliban has demonstrated that it is attempting to uphold “red-lines” designated by the negotiations with the United States. At the same time, it has found loopholes in the agreement. It is still carrying attacks outside of the pre-agreed 34 major cities, especially on civilians. The attacks are measures utilized by the Taliban to put an increased pressure on the Afghan government, that can be used to induce demands such as the full execution of a prisoner swap.

At the same time, the reliability of the information on Taliban attacks coming from the Afghan central government has become an issue. It seems to be deliberately exaggerating some aspects of the Taliban’s threat to gain leverage in the negotiations and put pressure on the United States. President Ghani and officials of the central government have charged that the Taliban was responsible for the large-scale attacks that took place on May 12, 2020, that included a massacre of the mothers in a maternity ward and an attack on a funeral.

The Taliban denied such responsibility and blamed ISIS-K for the attack on the maternity ward. The U.S. government also blamed ISIS-K – but the central government was still quick to blame the Taliban. President Ghani even relaunched a military operation recently against the Taliban, which once again setback the peace negotiations. The *Washington Post* reported that,⁵²

U.S. officials issued an emphatic, public rejection of the Afghan government claims. U.S. special representative Zalmay Khalilzad [tweeted](#) the United States blamed the Islamic State for the bloodshed. The U.S. military command in Kabul’s “initial assessment” also implicated the Islamic State, according to spokesman, Col. Sonny Leggett.

...The acting director of Afghanistan’s main intelligence agency reinforced the government’s claims after the maternity ward attack, saying that the Taliban is working with the Islamic State and that “relations between the Taliban and other terrorist groups have expanded.” Speaking at a news conference, Ahmad Zia Saraj said his agency had fingerprints of captured Islamic State fighters that match those of suspected Taliban militants, suggesting links between the two factions.

There also have been some positive signs. The May 26, 2020, prisoner exchange by the Afghan government did occur at the end of a 3-day ceasefire with the Taliban. The ceasefire coincided with the Muslim festival Eid al-Fitr, which began the evening of May 23, 2020, and marks the end of the month-long fasting of Ramadan. Not including the religious symbolism that the ceasefire may hold, it is significant for being the Taliban’s second ceasefire since the 2001 U.S. invasion.⁵³

One reason the Taliban may have agreed to the ceasefire could be attributed to the increase in the surge of attacks committed by ISIS-K in the previous few weeks. With U.S., coalition, and Afghan forces all agreeing to uphold the ceasefire and the Taliban also agreeing to halt its offensive forces against the government – although the group did stipulate that it might continue defensive attacks against any threatening foreign forces – only ISIS-K would be conducting attacks during the three-day ceasefire. It is clear that both Afghan government forces and the Taliban have conducted attacks recently; however, there have been deadly attacks, most likely committed by ISIS-K, which the central government has accused the Taliban for conducting.

However, offering a temporary ceasefire has scarcely meant the Taliban has not continued to intentionally control the rate of attacks to benefit its position. The attacks following the ceasefire may have been used as a “stick” to put pressure on the Afghan central government, but the reduction of attacks controlled and organized by the Taliban can just as easily be used as a “carrot” to win support for the Taliban’s positions.

Moreover, as is shown later, ISIS-K, is a third player that is adding pressure to already tense relations between the central government and the Taliban. It was ISIS-K that claimed

responsibility for the attack at the funeral, and – although no one has come forward to claim responsibility for the massacre at the maternity ward and the Taliban did condemn the event – U.S. intelligence agencies do believe ISIS-K was also responsible.

It is all too clear that all sides can now exploit violence in different ways. ISIS-K can use anonymous attacks, the central government can manipulate charges against the Taliban, and the Taliban can just as easily exploit any mistakes committed by the central government.

Civilian Casualties

It is far too early, and there is far too little data, to even guesstimate how much the peace agreements will reduce violence and casualties over time. Sources differ sharply over the data on recent trends as well as on how to count and assess the figures. The *LIG Quarterly Report* does note, however, that the UN and NATO/USFOR-A data on civilian casualties now largely agree that there are some positive trends in civilian deaths, and only seven U.S. soldiers died in the first quarter of 2020. (Reporting on Afghan military and security force casualties is classified).⁵⁴

This quarter, Resolute Support reported that civilian casualties continued to decrease from the previous two quarters—in part due to the signing of the U.S.-Taliban agreement. Resolute Support reported that it verified 1,268 civilian casualties (486 killed and 782 wounded) during the January to March period, compared to 1,878 the previous quarter...

There were 783 fewer casualties this quarter than during the same quarter last year. The most common cause of civilian casualties this quarter was direct fire, causing 590 civilian casualties, followed by improvised explosive devices, accounting for 404 civilian casualties. The provinces with the greatest numbers of civilian casualties were Kabul, Kunduz, Helmand, Nangarhar, and Herat.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) also provides a quarterly report of civilian casualties in Afghanistan. UNAMA reported 1,293 civilian casualties this quarter (533 killed and 760 injured). This was the lowest civilian casualty total recorded by UNAMA for a January through March quarter since 2012...UNAMA reported a significant decrease of civilian casualties attributed to the Taliban during the first 2 months of the year in comparison to the same period in 2019. However, in the month of March, following the reduction in violence week and the signing of the February 29 agreement between the United States and the Taliban, civilian casualties attributed to the Taliban increased in comparison to March 2019. In its report, UNAMA stated that it was “gravely concerned with the acceleration of violence observed in March,” which it said was mainly a function of Taliban attacks on the ANDSF and could result in additional civilian casualties.

On February 22, UNAMA issued its annual report of civilian casualties in Afghanistan for 2019. UNAMA documented 10,392 civilian casualties (3,403 killed and 6,989 injured) in 2019, representing a 5 percent decrease as compared to 2018 (10,994 with 3,803 killed and 7,191 injured) and the lowest overall number of civilian casualties since 2013. UNAMA reported that the reduction was driven by a decrease in civilian casualties caused by ISIS-K. However, civilian casualties caused by other parties, especially the Taliban, increased, with significant fluctuations coinciding with gains and setbacks made during peace negotiations between the United States and the Taliban.

While Resolute Support and UNAMA often report similar overall trends in civilian casualties, their data also expose differences in total numbers and attribution of responsibility. This is due, in large part, to differences in methodology. Resolute Support assesses reports of civilian casualties using ANDSF and coalition operational reports, aircraft video footage, records of U.S. and Afghan weapons releases, and other coalition and Afghan government-generated information. UNAMA investigates reports of civilian casualties using witness accounts and statements from Afghan officials. In addition, the two organizations use different definitions of “civilian,” which UNAMA defines more broadly than Resolute Support.

The UN reporting is more negative, and such trends can be seasonal or be driven by a wide variety of factors. For example, casualties are normally lower in the winter and early spring, and the drop

in civilian casualties shown in the LIG data for January-March in **Part One of Chart Seven** is small, and the comparative drop in the UN data in Chart Seven for 2020 versus 2019 may not reflect a peace agreement-driven trend.

Moreover, **Part Two of Chart Seven** warns that UN data show a steady increase in Afghan government-inflicted civilian casualties as U.S. forces became less active – potentially undermining Afghan popular trust in the Afghan forces. The United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) quarterly report on the *Protection of Civilians in Armed Combat* for 1 January-31 March 2020 is also notably less positive than the LIG report, and it provides a grim picture of the realities behind the numbers:⁵⁵

UNAMA is gravely concerned with the acceleration in violence observed in March, mainly by the Taliban against Afghan national security forces, and the consequent increase in the number of civilian casualties and harm caused, particularly in the northern and north-eastern regions. This concerning trend was all the more notable as it followed a ‘reduction in violence’ week - 22 February to 28 February – between the Pro-Government Forces and the Taliban that then led to the agreement signed between the United States and the Taliban on 29 February.

Throughout the first quarter, ground engagements were the leading cause of civilian casualties causing almost one-third of the overall total, followed by targeted killings and non-suicide IEDs. Targeted killings were the leading cause of civilian deaths. Civilians living in Kabul, Balkh and Faryab provinces were most affected (in that order).

The number of civilian deaths attributed to Anti-Government Elements – particularly the Taliban – increased by 22 per cent in the first quarter of 2020 as compared to the same time period in 2019, mainly due to a disturbing increase in targeted killings and summary executions. Although UNAMA documented an overall reduction in civilian casualties caused by the Afghan national security forces for the quarter, it is concerned that their operations led to an uptick particularly from the use of indirect fire, and airstrikes.

...Anti-Government Elements continued to be responsible for the majority of civilian casualties – 55 per cent - during the first quarter, causing 710 civilian casualties (282 killed and 428 injured). UNAMA attributed 39 per cent to Taliban³, 13 per cent to Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP)⁴ and the remainder to undetermined Anti-Government Elements.

UNAMA verified a significant decrease of civilian casualties attributed to the Taliban during the first two months of the year in comparison to the same period in 2019, particularly from a drastic reduction in suicide and complex attacks. However, in the month of March, following the reduction in violence week and the signing of the 29 February agreement between the US and the Taliban, civilian casualties attributed to the Taliban increased in comparison to March 2019, mainly due to a notable increase in civilian deaths resulting from non-suicide IEDs and ground engagements.

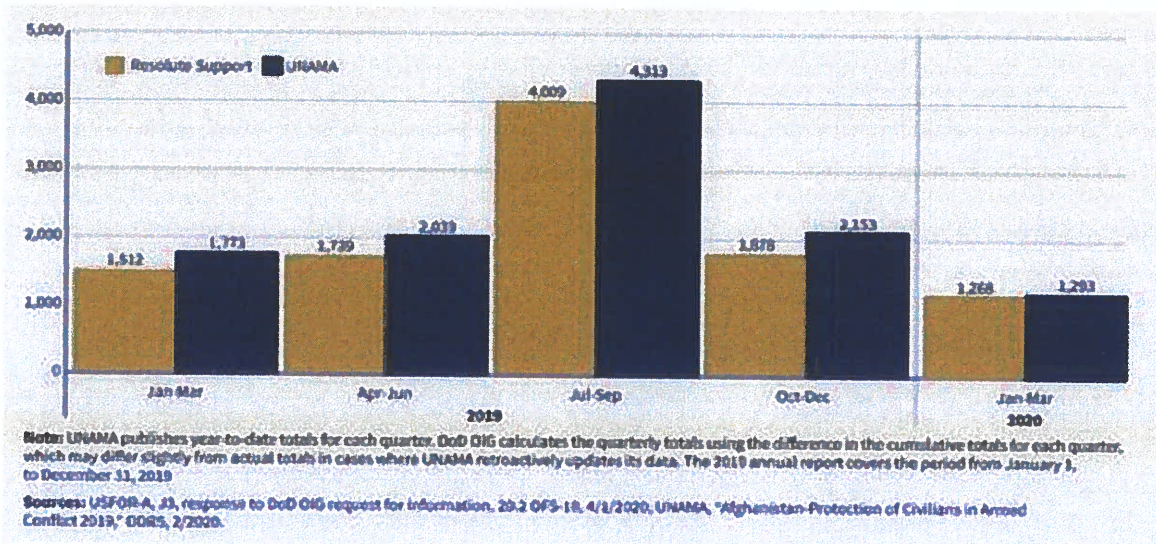
UNAMA is specifically concerned about an increase in civilian deaths from intentional targeting of civilians during the first quarter of 2020, as compared to 2019. Two of the most egregious incidents were mass shootings claimed by ISIL-KP in March: an attack on 6 March at a commemoration for a Hazara leader in Kabul, which killed 34 civilians and injured 78 more, and an attack on 25 March on worshippers at a Sikh-Hindu temple in Kabul, which killed 26 civilians and injured 11 more. Targeted killings of civilians by the Taliban included the killing of a health worker in Zazi Aryoub district of Paktya province on 20 January; a judge in Injil district of Herat province on 17 February; and a teacher in Khogyani district of Nangarhar province on 13 March.

UNAMA documented a disturbing increase in abductions of civilians carried out by the Taliban in the first quarter of 2020 as compared to 2019, with a spike occurring during the reduction in violence period at the end of February and the subsequent month of March. UNAMA is gravely concerned by abduction cases that have led to summary executions, including an incident on 6 March in Kushk district of Herat province in which seven adult men, including a teacher, were abducted and killed by Taliban a few kilometers from their village.

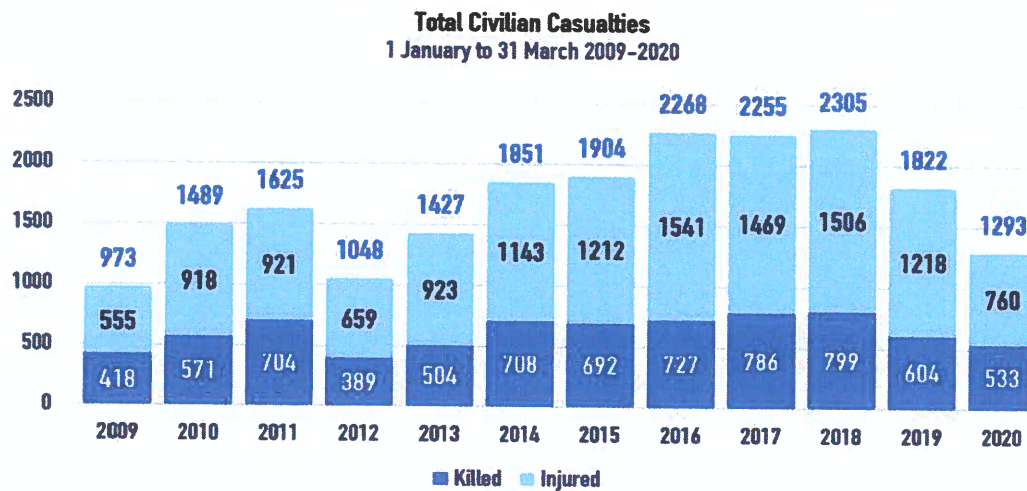
Furthermore, UNAMA documented an increase in civilian deaths from pressure-plate IEDs, which function as improvised anti-personnel landmines. During the first quarter, UNAMA documented 100 civilian casualties (47 killed and 53 injured) from pressure-plate IEDs, all of which were attributed to the Taliban.”

Chart Seven – Part One: LIG and UNAMA Civilian Casualty Estimates

LIG Civilian Casualty Numbers 2015-2020

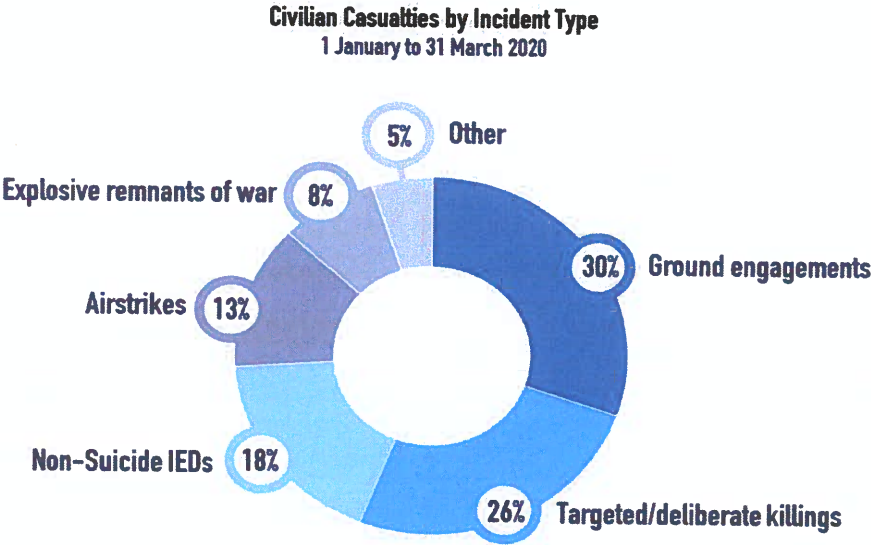
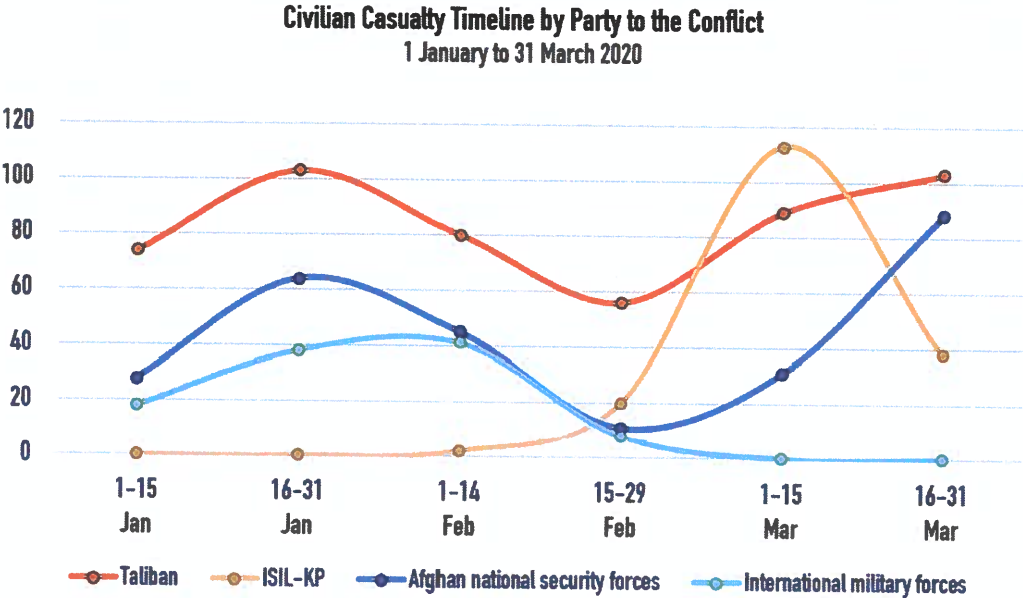


UNAMA Civilian Casualty Numbers 2009-2020



Source: Lead Inspector General (LIG), *Quarterly Report to Congress on Operation Freedom's Sentinel*, January 1, 2020-March 31, 2020, May 19, 2020, pp. 18, 20-21, <https://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/2191020/lead-inspector-general-for-operation-freedom-s-sentinel-i-quarterly-report-to-th/>.

Chart Seven – Part Two: LIG and UNAMA Civilian Casualty Timeline and Incident Type



Source: United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) “Rising civilian casualty numbers highlight urgent need to halt fighting and re-focus on peace negotiations,” May 19, 2020, <https://unama.unmissions.org/rising-civilian-casualty-numbers-highlight-urgent-need-halt-fighting-and-re-focus-peace-negotiations>

The U.S. has a different view of these trends. It describes in depth its efforts to consult with the UN and with Afghan experts and civilian society representatives. It also provides the comparative estimates of casualties shown in **Chart Eight**. This chart shows that the DoD 1225 report for June 2020 provides a very different estimate from the UN:⁵⁶

Overall, civilian casualties caused by all parties to the conflict decreased by 9 percent during this reporting period compared to the same period last year. Insurgent and terrorist attacks caused 88 percent of civilian casualties. USFOR-A continued to support political reconciliation efforts by significantly reducing military operations against the Taliban before and during the week-long RIV period and after the signing of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement on February 29, 2020.

USFOR-A documented 2,801 civilian casualties from November 1, 2019, to April 30, 2020, of which 1,021 civilians were killed and 1,780 civilians were injured. Of the 2,801 civilian casualties, USFOR-A attributed 47 civilian casualties (34 civilians killed and 13 civilians injured) to U.S.-led Coalition forces in 21 events; 133 civilian casualties (51 civilians killed and 82 civilians injured) to the ANDSF; 2,459 civilian casualties (891 civilians killed and 1,568 civilians injured) to insurgents and terrorists; and 162 civilian casualties (45 civilians killed and 117 civilians injured) to other/unknown parties to the conflict.

UNAMA's latest report assessed that there were 1,293 civilian casualties from January 1 – March 31, 2020, of which 533 civilians were killed and 760 civilians were injured. UNAMA reported that insurgents and terrorists were responsible for 710 civilian casualties (282 civilians killed and 428 civilians injured). UNAMA also reported that the ANDSF were responsible for 267 civilian casualties (99 civilians killed and 168 civilians injured); and that international military forces were responsible for 105 civilian casualties (80 civilians killed and 25 civilians injured). UNAMA attributed the remaining 171 civilian casualties (53 civilians killed and 118 civilians injured) to other or unknown parties to the conflict.

The difference in the numbers of civilian casualties reported by USFOR-A and UNAMA is mainly due to differences in (1) information sources, and (2) understanding about who receives protection as civilians under the law of war. For example, U.S. forces often collect intelligence on persons and locations long before U.S. forces conduct attacks on or near those persons and locations. USFOR-A leaders also know where U.S. forces are operating and why they are targeting certain persons and objects as part of the armed conflict. Thus, in addition to the information provided by external entities, such as IOs and NGOs, USFOR-A has access to a wide range of information and data directly relevant to determining the actions of U.S. forces and the situation on the ground at the time of attacks they may conduct, including full-motion video, operational summaries, aircraft mission reports, intelligence reports, and digital and other imagery, which are generally not available to external entities. USFOR-A also has access to and considers in its assessments open-source media, social media, and other sources that can be a basis for assertions made by external entities.

In contrast to USFOR-A, external entities are often reacting to information that is given to them by bystanders or other individuals who may not have perspective about: (1) which force conducted the attack; and (2) what was targeted and why. These sources might also have biases or reasons to lie. Thus, assessments by external entities often are efforts to piece together what happened after different incidents from limited and potentially inaccurate information. In many cases, USFOR-A cannot verify the credibility of the people providing information to external entities and the veracity of the information itself. In this context, it is worth noting that external entities' efforts to assess reports of civilian casualties accurately may be undermined by non-State armed groups in Afghanistan generally not distinguishing themselves from the civilian population and those groups' efforts to influence Afghan and Western audiences through propaganda and misinformation about civilian casualties.

In addition to differences in the information available to USFOR-A and external entities from which assessments are made, USFOR-A and some external entities are using different interpretations about who receives protections of civilians under the law of war (otherwise known as the law of armed conflict or international humanitarian law). When assessing reports of civilian casualties, USFOR-A considers whether any members of the civilian population were wounded or killed as a direct result of U.S. military operations. For the purposes of such assessments, USFOR-A does not include persons who have forfeited the protections of civilian status by engaging in hostilities, such as by being part of a non-State armed group like the Taliban or ISIS. For example, if a U.S. strike targets a member of the Taliban or ISIS, USFOR-A would consider that person to be a combatant under the Laws of Armed Conflict (rather than a civilian) for the purpose of

civilian casualty assessments, regardless of whether the person was continuously engaged in a combat function at the time he or she was wounded or killed.

Some external entities purport to be applying the same body of law as USFOR-A, but they have often been relying on interpretations of the law of war that have not been accepted by the United States. For example, some external entities appear to believe that members of the Taliban and ISIS that do not have a “continuous combat function” should be immune from attack except for such time as they participate directly in hostilities. These external entities would seem to support “revolving door” protections for members of the Taliban and ISIS, contrary to longstanding U.S. interpretations of the law of war. See U.S. Department of Defense Law of War Manual 5.8.4.2 (June 2015, Updated Dec. 2016). The International Committee on Red Cross document that has been cited for this view has been widely criticized for departing from established State interpretations and is not legally binding on the United States.

To the degree that external entities are relying in their assessments on interpretations of legal standards that the United States has not accepted, these entities are not applying an accurate understanding of who receives protections as civilians for the purposes of relevant civilian casualty assessments.

These issues will become far less important if a real peace agreement is reached. They are, however, critical because so much reporting on casualties in recent wars covers the impact of modern weapons and air power, but not the role of insurgent and extremist forces in creating refugees, IDP, less visible levels of casualties, or the fact that such forces increasingly use civilians as shields and as the equivalent of weapons of war – benefitting from when they are not struck, using casualties as propaganda weapons, or claiming their fighters are civilians.

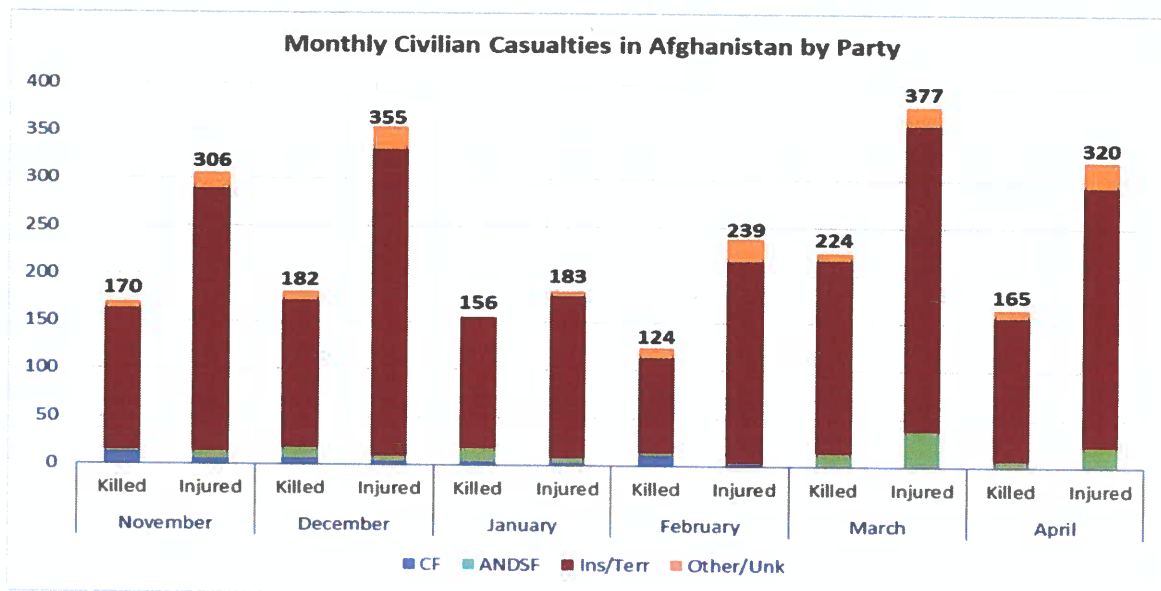
This will remain serious if the war continues, particularly since the Afghan government – like most governments – lack anything similar to the U.S. intelligence and targeting assets to limit civilian casualties and collateral damage or the ability to assess the casualties that result.

It is also clear that any attack on the civilian population – regardless of who initiates it, puts increased pressure on the peace process and increases the hostility between the central government and the Taliban – further threatening peace negotiations and encouraging more violence. According to a report by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) civilian casualties increased by more than a quarter in April compared to the corresponding months in 2019 – 172 were caused by the Afghan central government’s operations and 208 by the Taliban.⁵⁷

Another key issue that will become steadily more important if the peace process does move forward is the potential shift away from killing and combat to kidnappings, extortion, displacements, beatings, and other forms of intimidation that do not show up in casualty data or get the same media reporting. Past insurgencies show there are many different ways to keep fighting without actually fighting.

Chart Eight – U.S. Estimate of Civilian Casualties

RS Civilian Casualties from November 1, 2019 to April 30, 2020



1st Quarter 2020 RS and UNAMA CIVCAS Reporting

Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan, January 1 - March 31, 2020							
	Parties to the Conflict	USFOR-A Data			UNAMA Data		
		Killed	Injured	Total	Killed	Injured	Total
U.S.-led Coalition/ Afghan Forces	U.S.-led Coalition Forces	14	5	19	80	25	105
	Afghan Security Forces	32	44	76	99	168	267
	Other/Unknown	-	-	-	19	21	40
	Subtotal	46	49	95	198	214	412
Terrorists and Insurgents	Taliban	191	297	488	215	290	505
	ISIS-K	56	67	123	63	110	173
	Unknown	191	337	528	4	28	32
	Subtotal	438	701	1,139	282	428	710
Crossfire/ Other/ Unknown		20	49	69	53	118	171
Total		504	799	1,303	533	760	1,293

Source: *Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan*, Report to Congress in Accordance with Section 1225 of the National Defense Authorization Act, June 2020, pp. 21-23.

The Taliban's Unknown "Peace" Strategy

There is no clear indication as of yet to what the Taliban's long-term peace or war fighting strategy will be, or that it has united around a given strategy. So far, it seems to have concluded that its best approach to gaining some form of victory is to avoid or severely limit attacks on U.S. forces and facilities as the U.S. withdraws, to limit major attacks on Afghan forces and population centers, and to keep up a low level war of attrition that demonstrates its continued strength – which can be used to gain leverage in the negotiations, to resume the war if the negotiations break down, or to put pressure on the new government once a peace is reached. The Taliban also understands the domestic political forces in the U.S. behind the accelerated timeline that the Trump administration has for Afghanistan, particularly as a political victory before the November elections, and may use this timeline to its advantage throughout the negotiations.

This does not mean, however, that the Taliban feels that it cannot continue the war once the U.S. has phased out to the point where any return has become politically or militarily difficult. The Taliban may feel it cannot gain control of Afghanistan's major population centers until U.S. forces leave, and that it can either win the peace politically or defeat the central government once the U.S. leaves.

Here, it is important to note that none of the peace agreements to date address disarming Taliban forces or absorbing them into the central government security forces, but rather call for them to cooperate in defeating other rebel and extremist groups like affiliates of ISIS. Yet, although the Taliban negotiated a peace deal that was dependent on the stipulation that it would actively suppress terrorist movements like al Qaeda and ISIS, the Taliban has long treated other extremist groups like its radical offshoot, the Haqqani Network, as allies. It also issued a eulogy praising Mullah Mohammed Omar's "historical statement" that marked the seventh anniversary of his death. A report in the *Long War Journal* noted that this statement, entitled "A legendary leader, the Omar of our time," was placed on the Taliban's official website, *Voice of Jihad*, on April 23, 2020.⁵⁸

The peace agreements also did not reflect any change in the Taliban's goals and policies, and they did not address what kind of bargain – if any – the Taliban would make that would allow it to compromise its stated ideology or to reconcile its inherent contradictions with the policies followed by both the central government and the larger blocs of the regional populations and power brokers.

The Taliban has not sent clear signals as to how it now views any changes in its approach to governance, the rule of law, or the enforcement of its social policies. Since 2001, the Taliban has only had to act as a shadow government – by providing services and resolving disputes. It has created a highly decentralized structure of fighters in Afghanistan and placed many of its leaders in Pakistan or outside the immediate zones of fighting – meanwhile, the powers and authority of its central leadership is far less clear than it was at the time of Omar's rule.

The Taliban can also agree to a peace without having to pay the costs of governance or economic development. It has long been able to take indirect advantage of the goods and services provided by an Afghan central government that have been funded and supported by the massive aid from the United States and its allies. The Taliban must now agree on a peace that either involves some common concept of how to approach the future, or it must effectively agree to not address the real issues involved in forging a peace until some new form of government is created – an approach which could easily lead to the revival of its power struggles with the central government.

While issues like the role and education of women get the most Western media attention, they are only part of the ideological issues involved. The Taliban's overall approach to human rights, tolerance of other faiths, tolerance of modern education for both men and women, the rule of law, and willingness to accept the creation of a modern economy linked to global trade and investment standards all present issues that have not yet been addressed in the peace process, along with the future role of Taliban fighters and officials.

Similarly, the Taliban's ability to finance itself after a peace has not been addressed, although the Taliban would then have to finance itself as government. This presents major political problems because the entire financing structure of the Afghan government and its acceptance of outside economic and military aid are equally critical issues in defining a peace as the government is currently dependent on outside aid for some 70% of its funding. A final peace negotiation must address the issue of whether the Taliban can work with – or share power with – a central government that is backed, funded, and reliant on Western support.

What happens to Taliban leaders and fighters is another key challenge that none of the peace agreements or negotiations have yet addressed. Financing and living conditions are never casual issues in any power struggle. Since 2001, the Taliban has succeeded by inspiring young men to keep joining and fighting, but it has also paid them and given them status. The Taliban has been able to pay for their services and the war by profiting from the equivalent of *zakat* – Islamic levies that are essentially glorified taxes – from Afghan families as well as from extortion and participating in the drug trade. The issue is not simply just financing a government that has Taliban participation, a real peace will require decisions as to how the Taliban will continue to pay its fighters and supporters in an official manner as part of the Afghan government.

Equally serious questions arise as to how a Taliban that becomes part of some peacetime government will deal with an Afghan population that does not broadly support its rule, and how well it can exploit the many failures in Afghanistan's present levels of governance and economy. How does a final peace agreement reconcile the Taliban with the different social and economic goals desired by most Afghans? How does the Taliban compromise on the wide range of reforms and deal with future Afghan dependence on the export of narcotics trade and the potential need for serious tax-collection and reduction in corruption – particularly if it takes positions that sharply limit foreign aid, investment, and loans?

Peace as an Extension of War by Other Means

Peace is also a highly relative term, and it seems far more likely that the Taliban and the factions in the central government will compete in trying to win any actual peace than find any real common ground. There is a serious danger that peace negotiations – or whatever government and political system that emerges out of a full peace agreement – will become an extension of war by other means. Peace efforts, like all forms of politics, can easily become a new form of struggle between warring parties.

Many peace negotiations fail even under the best of conditions – even when the sides negotiating actually want a peace supported by terms that the other sides can accept. As cases as diverse as Cambodia, Nepal, and the Sudan show, however, even an apparently successful peace negotiation can end in a “peace” that becomes a new form of war – ranging from efforts that exploit an actual peace agreement in order to achieve the goals a given side set during the war to efforts that exploit the negotiation process to undermine or defeat the other side.

The collapse of South Vietnam showed that a weak and divided government can lose a peace even when it has apparently won a military victory. In the case of the Afghan central government, there are all too many reasons to doubt its ability to achieve enough unity and leadership to actually negotiate successfully. The Afghan central government is now too divided to actually govern, and it is brutally clear that there is no current leader that can quickly unify it.

The ISIS-K Threat

As noted earlier, the Taliban also is not the only source of extremism that the peace process must handle. The peace accords may commit the Taliban to countering any violence from terrorist groups, but the Taliban has been allied in the past with the Haqqani network and Al Qaeda – as well as movements like the Caucasus Emirate, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohamadi.

It also faces extremist movements that have been consistent rivals, and which are now active threats. These include a number of small movements, but they also include a more serious threat from ISIS-K. These movements may lose strength or become more isolated if the peace process works, but it is also possible that the Taliban might split and some part might join or ally with ISIS-K.

The history of extremist movements, and rebels in general, is one of sudden and unexpected changes in name and leadership; the sudden creation of new splinter groups; and divisions over leadership, power, money, and ideology. It is dangerous to characterize either the Taliban or the Afghan central government by its present leadership or structure. History warns that the odds of both surviving any transition to actually implementing an actual government are at best likely to be slim.

As for the more immediate threat from ISIS-K, experts disagree over the current threat that ISIS-K – and other smaller extremist factions – pose to the central government and its forces, the Taliban, and the peace process. The LIG report, which draws upon command and declassified U.S. intelligence, summarized the threat as follows – as of the end of March 2020:⁵⁹

Last quarter, the DoD reported that ISIS-K suffered significant losses in Nangarhar province, where the terrorist group was headquartered, due to ANDSF operations and mass surrenders. U.S., coalition, and ANDSF forces continued operations in Nangarhar and Kundar provinces during the quarter to target the remaining fighters. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) estimated that as of mid-March, approximately

300 to 2,500 ISIS-K members remained in Afghanistan. This estimate is a lower figure than published media estimates that ISIS-K members numbered roughly 3,000 members as of January 2020. According to a January UN report, only 50 to 100 ISIS-K members remained in Nangarhar after largely being expelled in November 2019.

Last quarter, USFOR-A reported to the DoD OIG that Taliban ground operations contributed to the reduction of ISIS-K fighters in Afghanistan. In March, General Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr., Commander of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), stated to Congress that the Taliban had proven “very effective” against ISIS-K in Nangarhar province, and that U.S. forces suspended airstrikes against Taliban engaged in fighting with ISIS-K and used “some” air strikes against known ISIS-K locations during that fighting—but the United States did not coordinate any actions with the Taliban. The DoD OIG did not receive any publicly releasable responses to questions about further Taliban actions against ISIS-K this quarter.

According to the DIA, ISIS-K’s loss of Nangarhar last quarter diminished its planning and recruitment efforts. The DIA reported that the loss of key territory also diminished ISIS-K’s ability to conduct high-profile attacks. The DIA and experts quoted in the media assessed that ISIS-K would continue to lose territory and members in the coming year.

The DIA assessed that while the loss of key territory caused ISIS-K to change how it operates, it continues to pose a threat to U.S., coalition, and Afghan forces inside Afghanistan. According to media reporting, ISIS-K is attempting to consolidate its forces in Kunar province. From there, ISIS-K has shifted to clandestine operations in case the group is expelled from Kunar, according to a media report. The DIA cited open source news reports stating that as of early March, ISIS-K clandestine cells were continuing to plan and conduct operations against U.S. and Afghan forces.

NATO Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan (NSOCC-A) reported to the DoD OIG that there had been no changes to U.S. counterterrorism strategy or operations this quarter.

More broadly, the LIG report described ISIS-K’s opposition to the peace progress:⁶⁰

The U.S.-Taliban agreement and planned subsequent U.S. withdrawal of forces raised concerns that the circumstances could motivate other terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan—especially those who haven’t seen the peace process as in their interest—to further the conflict and upend the deal... For example, in February, ISIS-K was portraying itself as an alternative to the Taliban to recruit members who oppose the agreement, according to open-source reporting. During the quarter, senior U.S. Government officials expressed concern about groups attempting to disrupt the agreement, particularly during the reduction in violence period...

According to the DIA, ISIS-K strongly opposed the peace agreement and continued to conduct terrorist operations... The DIA stated that, as of the end of the quarter, it was not possible to determine the extent to which ISIS-K was benefiting from or using the agreement...

In February, al Qaeda released a statement endorsing the U.S.-Taliban peace agreement, calling it a “great victory” over the United States and its allies... The statement offered its congratulations to the Taliban’s leader Hibatullah Akhundzada and advised Afghans to unite under the “Islamic Emirate”—the name of the former Taliban government in Afghanistan. While al Qaeda called for all sides to honor the agreement, it also encouraged Muslims to “join the training camps under the leadership of the Islamic Emirate.” According to open-source reporting cited by the DIA, al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent was concerned about the peace talks but continued to maintain a close relationship with the Taliban...

The DIA told the DoD OIG that the Haqqani Network supports the U.S.-Taliban agreement, which represents tangible progress toward the network’s primary goal of removing foreign forces from Afghanistan... The DIA assessed that the Haqqani Network was following Taliban senior leadership guidance regarding the Taliban’s overall strategy for advancing the peace process... However, the Haqqani Network likely will continue participating in military operations against the Afghan government to support the Taliban’s “fight-and-talk” strategy moving into intra-Afghan negotiations... According to the DIA, the Taliban almost certainly sees maintaining a viable military campaign as being critical to securing leverage for advancing its goal of reestablishing a government grounded in Islamic law in Afghanistan.

The UN report issued in late May 2020 covered the ISIS-K threat in exceptional depth. It seems that the ISIS-K threat is now perceived as being relatively limited. Key portions of the UN analysis state that,⁶¹

... the Monitoring Team noted setbacks to ISIL-K that included continued loss of territory and high attrition rates for the senior leadership. Between September and November 2019, those setbacks turned into more existentially threatening blows as ISIL-K was forced out of its traditional stronghold of Nangarhar Province by successive military operations carried out by coordinated Afghan and United States forces. Likely seeing an opportunity to retake key smuggling routes lost to ISIL-K over the previous two years, Taliban forces also joined in the attacks.

... Whereas Afghan Forces had previously been able to clear territory of ISIL-K for only brief periods of time, operations since November 2019 have so far managed to hold these areas and prevent the return of ISIL-K fighters. This has had the added effect of curtailing ISIL-K revenues connected to the export of illicit timber and pine nuts that had previously been smuggled over the Spin Ghar mountains and into Orakzai, Pakistan.

... Officials reported that, from September to November 2019, the number of ISIL-K operatives in Nangarhar was reduced from 1,750 armed fighters and a leadership council of 22 senior members spread over seven districts, to fewer than 200 fighters who were under siege in the Takhto area of Achin District. Interlocutors of the Monitoring Team reported that, in the final assault upon the headquarters of ISIL-K at the foot of the Spin Ghar mountains in Bandar Valley alone, over 300 home-made improvised explosive devices had been encountered along the route into the area.

... Debriefing of military aged men who surrendered suggested that many recruits to ISIL-K had been coerced, either through the use of force or the threat of violence, to join. Others stated they were lured by wages initially offered by the group that never materialized. Local interlocutors stated that ISIL-K propaganda tactics of advertising high salaries for their fighters had been “nothing more than a false narrative to attract recruits and support”. They added that this “lie” could only be told once and further attraction of new local fighters then relied more and more on force or persecution for not joining.

... Prior to its forced retreat from Nangarhar, ISIL-K in Afghanistan had been viewed as arguably the most resilient and successful ISIL affiliate outside ISIL core. By the spring of 2020, key Afghan security officials were describing the security situation in Nangarhar Province as having seen “a complete reversal of events”, with Afghan Forces operations hailed as “a turning point” for the dismantling of the ISIL-K network.

... 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. The same interlocutors consistently highlighted that the ideology of the group was viewed sympathetically by some in the north, particularly among certain local ethnic Tajik and Uzbek populations....Sources had indicated in 2019 that two former Taliban commanders of ethnic Tajik and Uzbek origin from Kunduz Province, Mawlawi Satar (from Imam Sahib District)... and Mawlawi Abdullah Majid (from Khanabad District) had gone to fight for ISIL-K in Achin District of Nangarhar. Both were also reported as actively involved in the recruitment of ethnic Tajik and Uzbek men from Kunduz Province... More recently, ISIL-K suffered a further blow when its leader, Aslam Farooqi, senior ISIL-K military commanders, Qari Zahid and Saifullah, and 19 others were captured by Afghan Forces in Kandahar.

... ISIL-K is assessed to retain financial reserves estimated in the “tens of thousands of dollars”. The group continued to generate income at the local level through extortion, taxation and likely timber and mineral exploitation, but its recent reduction in territorial control suggests that these sources of income are now greatly diminished. Some financing from ISIL core was reported still to be forthcoming, but the amounts are not known.

... While Member State estimates of ISIL-K strength in Afghanistan continue to vary, the Monitoring Team assesses their strength at approximately 2,200 armed fighters, most of them in Kunar Province. Within Kunar, the group was stated to be located in remote areas of Tsowkey District³³ that are largely inaccessible by vehicle and provide large degrees of concealment from aerial observation owing to dense forestation. From

its remote locations in Kunar Province, ISIL-K reportedly still maintains limited communications with ISIL core via satellite links...

While operations in Nangarhar and Kunar have weakened the ability of ISIL-K to conduct high-profile attacks, debate continues as to how many operations were genuinely carried out by ISIL-K during the reporting period. Member States have commented that most attacks claimed by ISIL-K demonstrated some degree of “involvement, facilitation, or the provision of technical assistance” by the Haqqani Network. Furthermore, they have stated that ISIL-K “lacked the capability to launch complex attacks in Kabul on its own” while taking responsibility for operations that had, in all likelihood, been carried out by the Haqqani Network. Notably, the tactical autonomy of the Haqqani Network in pursuing Taliban goals enables them to support operations, which undermined the control and credibility of the Government of Afghanistan. Likewise, operations resulting in civilian casualties allow Taliban deniability whereas ISIL-K is willing to claim responsibility to demonstrate capability and relevance.

... While ISIL-K currently appears to have only limited strategic capability in Afghanistan, the ideology of the group still occupies a “virtual space” online and within militant madrasas that endorse the ISIL belief set. The threat that the group poses within universities and madrasas related to continued recruitment remains a concern for many interlocutors. Member States also remain concerned about the global agenda of ISIL-K and its ability to recruit from other countries in the region.

On 2 April, a full month after the agreement between the United States and the Taliban was signed, *al-Naba*, the digital newsletter of ISIL, published an article citing the event as an admission of defeat by the United States, but was also critical of the Taliban. In the article, it was stated that foreign troops were still present in Afghanistan and that the Taliban had sold out to the “disbelievers and polytheists”. Judging from this one example, the group appears to be setting up a narrative that places ISIL as the only defiant terror group in an effort to gain recruitment from potentially dissident Taliban or Al-Qaida members who oppose any agreement with the United States or the Government of Afghanistan.

The DoD report issued at the end of June 2020 states that,⁶²

Since the fall of 2019, sustained pressure from the ANDSF, coalition forces, and the Taliban degraded ISIS through deaths, captures, and surrenders of ISIS fighters; this pressure forced ISIS to abandon territorial control in southern Nangarhar and in Kunar. Resolute Support assesses reduced pressure is likely to provide ISIS with opportunities to regenerate the organization. In late 2019, after ISIS lost control of key terrain in southern Nangarhar, ISIS may have created smaller cells to continue operating in Afghanistan, according to COMRS. ISIS’s effectiveness in these smaller cells will likely be constrained by ANDSF, U.S., Coalition, and Taliban pressure.

During this reporting period, ISIS has maintained the ability to defend itself and conduct mass casualty attacks, despite pressure from the Coalition, ANDSF, and the Taliban. As ISIS was dislocated from territory it controlled, the group may be moving to smaller groups in urban areas that are harder to locate and identify. Since February, ISIS claimed multiple MAIED, IDF, and a suicide complex attack in Kabul, demonstrating their operational capabilities and continuing threat to stability. Over the past few years, ISIS has continued to take a more active role in the management of regional ISIS networks in India, Bangladesh, and other areas assigned by ISIS- Core, but its progress in enabling or inspiring external attacks outside of Afghanistan and Pakistan has likely been limited. Although ISIS-K continues to develop connections to other networks outside of Afghanistan, it is largely operationally limited to South and Central Asia.

The al Qaeda Threat

As is noted elsewhere in this report, there is no expert agreement over the Taliban’s willingness to break its ties to al Qaeda or to sever its current level of cooperation with al Qaeda. The DoD June 2020 report does indicate, however, that official U.S. sources do not feel that the Taliban has broken with al Qaeda,⁶³

Al-Qaida poses a limited threat to U.S. personnel and our partners in Afghanistan. Al-Qaida’s regional affiliate—al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)—poses the greatest threat to those elements. AQIS routinely supports and works with low-level Taliban members in its efforts to undermine the Afghan Government, and maintains an enduring interest in attacking U.S. forces and Western targets in the region.

Additionally, AQIS assists local Taliban in some attacks, according to al-Qaida statements. AQ faces continuous Coalition CT pressure and will focus on ensuring its safe haven remains viable.

The few remaining al-Qaida Core members focus largely on survival, while delegating leadership of AQ's regional presence to AQIS leaders. AQ, including through AQIS, continues to work toward its stated goals of freeing occupied Muslim lands, establishing an Islamic caliphate, and implementing Sharia law. AQIS's interest in attacking U.S. forces and other Western targets in Afghanistan and the region persists, but continuing Coalition CT pressure has reduced AQIS's ability to conduct operations in Afghanistan without the support of the Taliban. AQIS likely poses a low threat to Afghan and U.S. entities in Afghanistan. *Despite recent progress in the peace process, AQIS maintains close ties to the Taliban in Afghanistan, likely for protection and training.*

Smaller Extremist Groups Affecting the Peace Process

The number and nature of the smaller extremist groups in Afghanistan varies with time. The UN report issued in May that identified the following smaller extremist threats:⁶⁴

... Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Jaish-i-Mohammed, and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba groups on which the Monitoring Team has written in previous reports. The presence of these groups is centered in the eastern provinces of Kunar, Nangarhar and Nuristan, where they operate under the umbrella of the Afghan Taliban.

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan is led by Noor Wali Mehsud and his deputy, Qari Amjad. The group is thought to have approximately 500 fighters in Kunar and about 180 in Nangarhar. One Member State reported that the total number of Pakistani nationals fighting with terrorist groups in Afghanistan may be as high as 6,000 to 6,500.

Other foreign terrorist groups identified as presenting a significant threat were Central Asian and Uighur militant groups that have long been present in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. Their gravitation to northern Afghanistan is partly attributable to its geographical proximity to their native countries but is also driven by sharing a common language with ethnic Uzbek, Tajik and Turkmen communities... Foremost among these foreign terrorist groups are the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Jamaat Ansarullah Tajikistan, Lashkar-e-Islam and the Salafist Group

These groups now seem to be only limited threats, but past experience with such extremist groups like the Taliban indicates that hardline elements often split off from the larger group during peace negotiations, and the offshoots then ally themselves with other such splinter groups. These emerging threats cannot be disregarded.

There also are extremist groups in neighboring and other countries that may come to play a growing role in Afghanistan or ally with Afghan groups. Afghanistan is scarcely the only unstable country in the region.

Afghanistan's Neighbors and the Peace Process

The peace effort is further complicated by the fact that multiple actors are playing a hand in Afghanistan and the region, both overtly and covertly, and the reactions of Afghanistan's neighbors to the peace process have been mixed. Russia has issued a joint statement with the U.S. welcoming the signing of the peace agreements, and it is also reported to accept some form of Taliban presence as inevitable. However, Russian intelligence is reported to have offered payments to the Taliban or Taliban fighters to kill U.S. soldiers in an effort to push the U.S. out of the regional more quickly.

China has focused on the Uighurs in its own territory, but also plays a role in northwestern Afghanistan. Pakistan and India compete for influence in Afghanistan, and Iran is concerned with the security of its border, the flow of opiates, and the security of the Shi'ite minority in Afghanistan.

Once again, there is no expert consensus on the current and probable future role of outside powers. When it comes to official U.S. reporting, the DoD 1225 report issued in June 2020 summarizes the role of each outside power as follows: 65

Russia: Russia very likely continues to support U.S.-Taliban reconciliation efforts in the hope that reconciliation will prevent a long-term U.S. military presence. As of February, the Russian government was working with the central government, regional countries, and the Taliban to gain increased influence in Afghanistan, expedite a U.S. military withdrawal, and address security challenges that might arise from a withdrawal. As of late February, Kremlin officials expressed support for the U.S.-Taliban Agreement and offered to facilitate IAN, which Russian officials supported as the best path towards forming an interim government. Russia has politically supported the Taliban to cultivate influence with the group, limit the Western military presence, and encourage counter ISIS operations, although Russia publicly denies their involvement. As of late 2019, Russian military forces stationed in Tajikistan have routinely conducted unilateral and multilateral exercises to maintain preparedness to defend against potential cross-border violence originating from northern Afghanistan. The Department of State has worked to leverage regional actors to support the U.S.-Taliban agreement. On March 6, the United States and Russian Federation issued a Joint Statement on the Signing of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement.

Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (collectively, “Central Asian countries”) view stability and security in Afghanistan in the context of the wider Central Asian region. Uzbekistan continues to expand trade links, allowing the shipment of Afghan materials to China. Some of the Central Asian countries have expressed concerns that ISIS may expand into Central Asia and destabilize the region. Uzbekistan played a constructive role in reconciliation as it sought to leverage its desired position as a regional leader and key economic link to Afghanistan to promote reconciliation efforts and economic development.

Pakistan: Pakistan has publicly supported the U.S.-Taliban Agreement as a way to end the conflict in Afghanistan. Pakistan’s senior leadership were invited to attend the signing of a peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban in early March as a sign of Islamabad’s strong support to facilitating peace in Afghanistan.

Iran: Iran pursues its goals in Afghanistan by providing calibrated support to the Taliban and engaging with and trying to strengthen ties with the Afghan government. Iran’s interests include removing the U.S./NATO presence, eliminating ISIS, increasing economic and security ties to the Afghan government, securing water rights, and improving border security. During the past year, Iran increased its outreach to both the Taliban Political Commission and the Afghan government to increase its role in the reconciliation process and secure Iranian interests in an agreement. Iranian officials characterized the U.S.-Taliban Agreement as illegitimate because it did not include the Afghan government and Afghanistan’s neighbors, and demanded that U.S. forces withdraw from the country, according to open-source reporting. The State Department recently participated in a 6+2 UN meeting on Afghanistan, which included Iran’s participation.

China: The Chinese government engages both the Afghan government and the Taliban in an attempt to achieve regional stability, which would, thereby protect Chinese personnel and investments. Although Oslo was set to hold IAN in early March, as of late 2019, the Chinese government was maintaining its offer to mediate abroad, and secure China’s western border from Uighur militants. between the Taliban and Afghan government.

India: India works with regional state actors, the Afghan Government, and Afghan power brokers to prevent transnational terrorist safe havens, and maintain access to Afghanistan as a gateway to Central Asian markets. The Indian government does not support the Taliban politically and continues to support the Afghan government. India has reiterated its support for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled peace process.

India has traditionally had strong ties with Afghanistan and remains the largest regional donor to the country (\$3 billion since 2001). Indian aid to Afghanistan focuses primarily on four main categories: humanitarian assistance; major infrastructure projects; small and community-based projects; and education and capacity development. A significant deterioration of security conditions in Afghanistan, however, may adversely affect the ability of India to provide aid.

The Gulf States: All of the Gulf states seek a stable Afghanistan. These states would support a ceasefire and peace process between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Qatar hosts the Taliban Political Commission (TPC) and provides a venue for relevant parties to engage in dialogue about the implementation and monitoring of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement. Qatari officials have also played a facilitation role with the Taliban to advance the peace agreement. Qatari C-17 aircraft also provide airlift for NATO operations in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and the UAE aspire to minimize Iranian and Qatari influence in Afghanistan.

The LIG report summarizes DIA's views on Iran as follows:⁶⁶

Iran's strategic objectives relative to Iran continue to be maintaining a stable Afghan central government and security along Iran's eastern border. According to the DIA, Iran's objectives also include protecting Shia populations, eliminating ISIS-K, opposing the U.S. presence in the region, and securing Iranian economic interests. Iran seeks to manipulate any future Afghan government by trying to influence elections and politics and by endeavoring to secure a central role in Taliban reconciliation talks. The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that during the quarter Iran pursued its objectives by engaging the Afghan government politically and economically while providing support to regional power brokers and lethal aid to the Taliban...

According to the DIA, nothing in Iran's March statements suggested Iran will actively oppose the deal, because it has previously voiced support for a U.S. withdrawal from the region...The DIA reported to the DoD OIG that Iran blames the United States for the lack of a clear victor in the presidential election and at the same time calls for forming an inclusive government. Iran did not publicly support either presidential candidate and did not send representatives to President Ghani's inauguration or to former Chief Executive Abdullah's competing ceremony...

Although U.S.-Iran tensions escalated in January following the U.S. airstrike in Baghdad that killed Major General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Qods Force, according to the media reports, there were no credible increased security threats in Afghanistan due to those tensions. Soleimani is considered responsible for the formation of the Fatemiyoun Brigade, a mostly Afghan militia of Shia Hazara men that Iran deployed to Syria in support of the Syrian regime in that country's civil war... Media reports speculated that the thousands of Fatemiyoun Brigade members that have returned to Afghanistan from the fight in Syria could pose a threat to stability if they establish a functional command structure...

According to the DIA, fewer than 3,000 Fatemiyoun fighters have returned to Afghanistan. The DIA assessed that, as of early 2020, returned Fatemiyoun fighters had not significantly affected the security environment in Afghanistan. The DIA told the DoD OIG that it assessed there are no indications that Iran continues to support the returned fighters, or that Iran intends to keep them organized as a militia in Afghanistan. However, Iran is likely able to re-contact fighters for additional deployments to Syria. The lack of Iranian support on the ground, the pro-Afghan government stance of most Hazaras, and the risk of backlash from the Taliban and Afghan government reduce the appeal to Tehran of using these fighters to further their interest in Afghanistan...

The DoD report is bland to the point of being misleading. All of Afghanistan's neighbors and Russia can be counted on seeking their own advantage and preserving their own interests. All have active intelligence operations in Afghanistan, and many have contact with – or ties to – the Taliban and other extremist groups, or with power brokers and factions within the Afghan central government. Russia, China, and Iran have an active interest in seeing the U.S. leave Central Asia – although this means some increase in regional instability and the extremist or ethnic/sectarian threats they may face.

Russia has become a critical issue. Recent U.S. intelligence assessments and U.S. military interrogations have discovered that Russia offered bounties to Taliban members to kill U.S. soldiers, and some reports indicate that this resulted in the death of U.S. and coalition forces serving in Afghanistan.⁶⁷ Although the details remain classified and reports do not distinguish how many U.S. and coalition forces died as a result of these bounties, they may include at least three

U.S. marines. The total number of U.S. forces that died from hostile gunfire or improvised bombs were 10 in 2018, 16 in 2019, and 2 as of mid-June 2020.⁶⁸

Pakistan also poses a serious problem. It has kept up its ties to the Taliban – and evidently some other Afghan extremist groups – in spite of its ties to the United States. Pakistan is clearly committed to preserving its border with Afghanistan and keeping India from having any major influence in the country. It is all too likely that Pakistan will take a divide and conquer approach to any Afghan peace, and at least covertly take the side of the Taliban if it takes a pro-Pakistani position.

As for other nearby states, Iran presents problems in terms of trade, exercising influence over Afghan Shi'ites, and border security. China is seeking trade and mining opportunities, as well as the help in containing minority and Islamic groups like the Uighurs. Each Central Asian state is seeking to secure its own interests to counter extremist groups. In the real world, regional “cooperation” following the development of peace is likely to consist of neighbor-by-neighbor competition and efforts to intervene in Afghanistan or to exploit it.

Cutting the Cost to the U.S. – With or Without a Real Peace

The U.S. sees the Afghan peace process as well as the Afghan central government as a significant challenge. As was the case in Vietnam, the Afghan war has gone on to the point where the United States increasingly seems ready to leave Afghanistan even if peace negotiations fail or if the end result does not bind both sides to a real peace. As this analysis shows, the Afghan central government has given the U.S. good reasons to do so, with few reasons to assume that staying the course if the current peace effort fails will have a happier end result.

The Total Cost of the Afghan War

One such reason is the cost of continuing to support an Afghan government that has failed in so many ways. Estimates of the total cost of the Afghan war to the United States differ sharply while some estimates further increase the cost by adding categories for future spending, interest, and baseline spending. At the same time, the U.S. Congress has never attempted to make realistic estimates of the real cost of the war, and the Department of Defense (DoD) has not continued to issue its *Cost of War Report* in 2020.

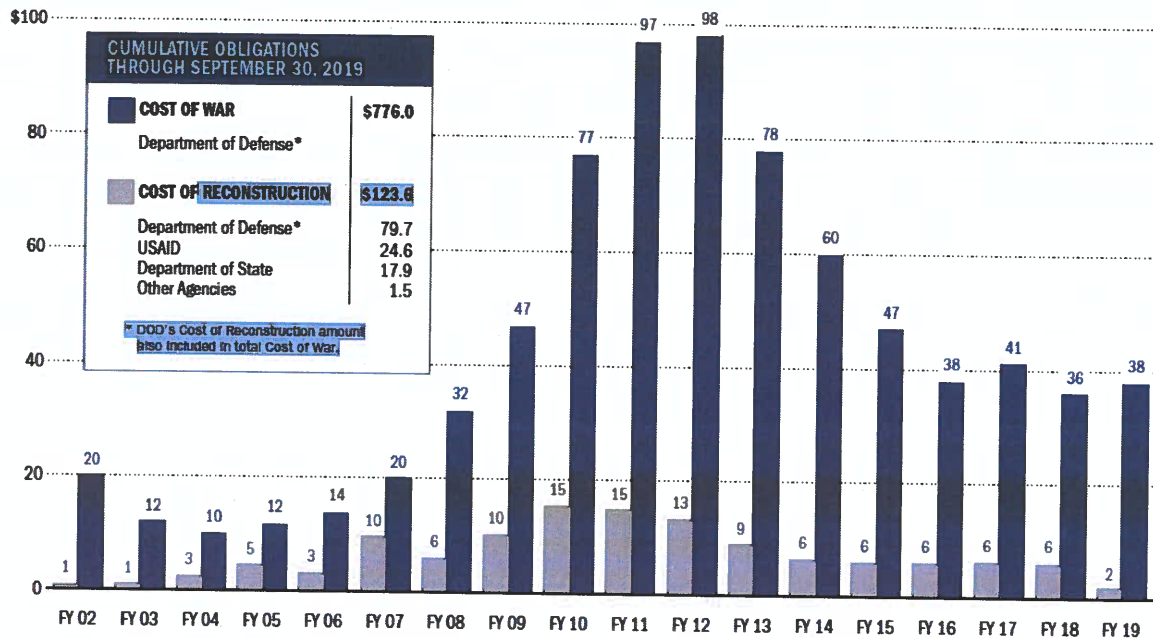
The last official U.S. *Cost of War Report* does estimate the costs of the Afghan War until the end of September 2019, and it puts the total war-related obligations between September 11, 2001 and September 30, 2019 at \$780 billion – with the Department of Defense (DoD) obligations at \$776 billion.⁶⁹ The same *Cost of War Report* indicated, however, that the annual cost of the Afghan War has dropped massively since a peak of \$115 billion a year – of which \$97 billion was appropriations for the DoD in FY2011 – to \$40 billion in FY2019 – of which \$38 billion went to the DoD.⁷⁰

The Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported in April 2020 that the United States had appropriated \$137.05 billion for civil and military aid since FY2002, of which 118.54 billion was in the largest account and \$90.75 billion had gone to Afghan forces. Out of this total, \$107.3 billion had been obligated, \$103.5 billion had been disbursed, and \$9.24 billion was remaining.⁷¹ These estimates are shown in **Chart Nine**.

Other estimates of the cost of the war are much higher, but they apply uncertain calculation methods that would raise the cost of all federal expenditures. They include adding federal interest payments on the national debt, Veteran retirement and medical costs, and baseline expenditures based on estimate of costs not directly assigned to combat – a set of additional costs that can be derived and added to many other areas of federal spending.⁷²

The human casualty costs include more than 2,400 dead U.S. military personnel and more than 38,000 Afghan civilians, but no clear totals exist for U.S. civilians, Afghan and allied military and security personnel, or Taliban and other anti-government forces. The DoD reports that the human cost to the U.S. military between October 7, 2001 and April 20, 2020 reached 2,445 dead; 1,913 killed in action; and 20,719 wounded in action.⁷³ U.S. casualty levels have remained minimal, however, since 2015. This is partly because the U.S. land combat role has been sharply limited and focused on the train and assist missions, and partly because the U.S. combat role has shifted to an emphasis on manned and unmanned air strikes and intelligence.

Chart Nine: SIGAR Estimates of the Costs of the Afghan War and Reconstruction (Annual and Cumulative Obligations: FY2002- FY2020 (\$US Current Billions)



Note: Numbers have been rounded. Cumulative obligations through September 30, 2019, differ markedly from cumulative appropriations through December 31, 2019, as presented elsewhere in the Status of Funds section, because the former figures do not include unobligated appropriations and DOD Cost of War reporting lags by one quarter.
Source: DOD, Cost of War Monthly Report, Total War-related Obligations by Year Incurred, data as of September 30, 2019. Obligation data shown against year funds obligated. SIGAR analysis of annual obligation of reconstruction accounts as presented in SIGAR's Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 10/30/2019. Obligation data shown against year funds appropriated.

Source: SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to Congress*, April 30, 2020, p. 46.

Aid and the Impact of the FY2021 Presidential Budget Request

There are no reliable budget data on U.S. plans for future spending on the war or on the continued support to Afghanistan if a peace settlement is reached, although it is clear that the U.S. is seeking to cut such spending as much as possible. The President's FY2021 budget request was formulated before the peace agreements, and it only provides the equivalent of placeholder numbers for FY2020 and future years spending.

The figures in the DoD's FY2021 Budget Summary called for cuts in the total Overseas Contingency Costs of the Afghan war from a peak of \$114 billion in FY2011, to \$45 billion in FY2019, to only \$17 billion in FY2020, and to \$14 billion in FY2021. A total of \$4.2 billion of these funds was requested to aid Afghan security forces in FY2020, and \$4.0 billion in FY2021.⁷⁴

Presumably, the withdrawal of all U.S. forces would lead to major cuts in these costs, although some contingency costs would probably still be incurred outside Afghanistan. The projected cuts in civil aid and aid to any new form of Afghan security forces are less clear, but they are probably planned to be significant.

SIGAR graphs of annual aid efforts by each program show astounding sudden rises and cuts in aid efforts that have made effective management, fiscal control, and implementation nearly impossible in many cases. They also, however, represent a consistent pattern of major cuts before the peace agreements were signed.

FY2020 and FY2021 data are missing for many major categories of aid. The April 2020 SIGAR report does show that:⁷⁵

- The appropriations for the Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) had been cut from a peak of close to \$11 billion FY2011 to \$4.92 billion by FY2020. This does not count funds for the NATO Afghan National Army (ANA) Trust Fund. The Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) had been cut from a peak of \$1.0 billion to nearly zero in FY2016.
- Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities (DICDA) had been cut from a peak of over \$480 million in FY2012 to nearly zero in FY2019.
- The appropriations for the Economic Support Fund (ESF) had been cut from a peak of some \$3.4 billion in FY2012 to \$350 million in FY2019. Title II appropriations had been cut from a peak of \$160 million in FY2002 to nearly zero in FY2019.
- Foreign Disaster Assistance (FDA) had been cut from a peak of \$200 million in FY2002 to nearly zero in FY2006, only to rise back to around \$150 million in FY2019. International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) had been cut from a peak of \$700 million in FY2005 to \$87.8 million in FY2019 – roughly half of its FY2018 total.
- Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) was cut from a peak of over \$130 million in FY2005 to under \$90 million in FY2019. Appropriations for the Nonproliferation,
- Anti-Terrorism Demining and other related programs swing widely from year-to-year, but they ended at \$38.8 million in FY2019.

Moreover, the DoD 1226 Report for June 2020 noted that revisions might be taking place in these spending levels,⁷⁶

...the Administration submitted the President's Budget Request for FY 2021. The amount of funding for direct war costs of OFS sought in that request is 27 percent less than the amount requested in FY2020. Most of this reduction in required funding reflects a smaller force level—a projected 8,600 at the beginning of FY2021 as compared with 14,000 at the beginning of FY 2020—resulting from continued efforts to optimize the U.S. force structure while retaining capability to provide necessary advising and combat enabler support to the ANDSF. The request for funding for the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund also contributes to the reduced mission cost; it is nearly \$800 million less than the FY2020 request and almost \$200 million below the FY2020 enacted appropriation.

There is no way to know how much U.S. aid would go to any new form of the Afghan government created by a peace settlement, what the combined elements the Afghan central government and the Taliban produced by such a settlement would receive by way of aid, or what the total budget costs of spending on Afghanistan will be.

As is discussed in more detail later, however, the present central government's current needs for aid are now high, and the government and Afghan forces cannot survive if the peace effort fails without massive U.S. spending. Furthermore, the IMF estimates that any real progress in development would raise these costs significantly. While expert estimates differ, the total near-term annual cost of aid necessary to sustain even the existing form of the Afghan government would probably be at least some \$6 billion to \$8 billion a year in constant U.S. dollars through FY2025.

The same uncertainties apply to international funding – with or without a successful peace settlement – and SIGAR reports that the cumulative totals for the four major aid programs totaled

\$30.92 billion between FY2002 and December 2019. The end of 2019 to April 2020 totals for the four main multilateral trust funds are \$12.16 billion for the World Bank-managed Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), \$5.98 billion for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)-managed Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA), \$3.12 billion for the NATO-managed Afghan National Army (ANA) Trust Fund (NATO ANA Trust Fund or NATF), and \$12.16 billion for the Asian Development Bank-administered Afghanistan Infrastructure Trust Fund (AITF).⁷⁷

One of the main vehicles for donors to fund government projects in Afghanistan is the World Bank's Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). SIGAR, however, notes the lack of oversight and evaluation of the use of funds and program effectiveness, especially by the World Bank, which has contributed to corruption and waste of aid money. For example, the National Solidarity Program (NSP) is the flagship program of ARTF, and it has attempted to provide services and infrastructure in the rural areas of Afghanistan. On paper, the program mobilized women's participation in projects and garnered community support for the national government. But in reality, NSP did not take major steps to improve the economy, improve local governance, or substantially change the role of women in society. The program's failure can be attributed to the lack of security, specifically caused by the disputed control with the Taliban – and the aid money was too limited to have a serious impact.

The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development released a meta-review of these aid efforts in March 2020, assessing the development assistance to Afghanistan. The review finds that, ⁷⁸

[On Education]... Most reports agree that substantial progress has been made regarding better access for boys and girls to primary education. Well-targeted projects did improve outcomes in primary education. However, the quality of education remains problematic, a large demand for infrastructure remains, and many gains may not be sustainable given the enduring insecurity and the lacking financial and bureaucratic capacities of the Afghan government. ⁷⁹

[On Health]... The available studies point to a tangible increase in access to basic health care and to a massive improvement in such health indicators as child and maternal mortality. Interventions in the health sector were usually effective. The reviewed reports suggest that successful interventions took place in midwifery training, antenatal care visits, deliveries attended by health workers, conditional cash transfers for women and community health workers, and improved family planning. ⁸⁰

[On Gender]... Evaluations suggest that improvements in access to services for women and girls – mainly in health and education – have been made. Progress, however, is attributable to the rehabilitation of infrastructure and the end of Taliban rule rather than the success of the gender projects themselves. ⁸¹

Regarding programming for gender, donors typically reported outputs only, but remained skeptical about outcomes or impacts. Donors noted that both the capacity and the political will of the Afghan government and political elites for gender equality programming remained very limited as prevailing cultural norms made progress difficult. Despite sustained support, the capacities of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) remained weak. SIGAR noted that gender programs were not adequately monitored and evaluated, which made it impossible to identify any possible impact. Insecurity, limited government capacity, and cultural norms also impeded any US efforts to advance women's rights.

Overall, the effectiveness of gender programming appears to be low. There are, however, pockets of modest success. Examples include rural literacy, increased access to health and education, and better livelihoods in women-specific activities within agriculture, such as mushroom farming and kitchen gardening. In sum, small, modest projects embedded in traditional structures helped to increase access to health, education, and modestly improved livelihoods for women. By contrast, larger, more ambitious projects aimed directly at changing gender norms and relations had no discernible impact.

The analysis of the Afghan economy made later in this report warns that the World Bank, IMF, CIA, and other sources see critical weaknesses in the Afghan economy, a lack of progress and often regression in recent years, exaggerated claims of success, acute dependence on outside aid, and critical levels of corruption.

This is not to say that outside aid has not created some useful infrastructure or improved some government services, such as healthcare and education, in Afghanistan. However, such aid has only had a limited “micro” impact on major nationwide “macro” problems. There is a critical lack of overall progress and reform, as well as effective planning and management of aid efforts. Far too much money has been siphoned away by corrupt officials or wasted on programs that have little meaningful impact.

If the central government and the Taliban are able to reach a peace deal, Afghanistan will still continue to rely on massive foreign aid and outside funding. However, instead of wasting the millions of dollars that was spent in the past, monetary support should be more aptly distributed moving forward. The Afghan people are greatly suffering, and they are not for want of needs that do require financial aid. If a real peace agreement is reached, donor countries must consider which programs will really address the nation's broader needs and have a high likelihood of being successful.

The Peace (or War): The Costs After FY2021

The overall cost of aid to a future Afghan government, and its role in supporting that government's budget, is discussed in more detail in the chapters on governance and economics, but there is no real way to make a projection except to say that it seems extremely unlikely that the U.S. will return high levels of troops even under worst case conditions if it carries out its current plans. There is no way to determine the needs of a post-peace Afghan government or one that the U.S. continues to support if a peace fails.

There is also a long history of nations making major aid cuts after a peace settlement, and an even longer history of nations failing to carry out reform plans, adjust their budgets, and reduce their need for aid unless donor countries cut the flow unilaterally. International aid conferences are not necessarily “liar's contests,” but they often can be pledging contests and there is a long history of recipient countries failing to make good on their promises to actually implement their reform plans.

To the extent there is any current official estimate of future costs of U.S. military aid – with or without a peace – the DoD 1225 report for June 2020 states that,⁸²

The ANDSF continues to be funded primarily through the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF). This appropriation enables the Secretary of Defense, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State, to fund the Afghan Forces. The majority of ASFF is used for sustainment and operations of the Afghan forces. NATO Allies and partner nations also play a prominent role in the financial support of the ANDSF by contributing to the NATO ANA Trust Fund (NATF), which supports the ANA, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)-administered Law and Order Trust Fund (LOTFA) that pays the salaries of police and builds MoI capacity. In addition, the Afghan Government draws upon its domestic revenues to contribute to ANDSF sustainment operations for ANDSF personnel. The ANDSF will continue to depend on capacity building support and donor financial assistance in 2020 and beyond.

... At the July 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels, the international community agreed to extend financial sustainment of the ANDSF through 2024. NATO's commitment enables the Afghan Government and its security forces to preserve past gains and maintain progress towards steadily increasing its financial contributions to security, and helps set the conditions for an Afghan-led political settlement. Future funding levels will depend on the current and future ANDSF force size and structure with the goal of ensuring the

ANDSF maintains the capacity and capability to apply the appropriate amount of military pressure to compel a negotiated peace settlement with the Taliban and secure the Afghan Government and populace. The magnitude of NATO's past financial contributions and its reliability in the future are critical to the effectiveness of Afghan security forces on the battlefield.

NATO allies and partners will revisit their contributions prior to completion of the current 2017- 2020 funding cycle, as previously established at the 2016 Warsaw Summit. At the 2012 Chicago Summit, donors agreed to support the training, equipping, financing, and capability development of the ANDSF until the end of 2017. At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, donor nations pledged about \$900 million in annual funding for the ANDSF until the end of 2020, totaling approximately 93 percent of the contributions pledged at Chicago Summit. The United States does not commit to a specific amount, but funds the majority of ANDSF requirements with ASFF.

... At the 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago, participants agreed that, as the Afghan economy and revenues grow, Afghanistan's annual share of the cost of the ANDSF will increase progressively from at least \$500 million in 2015, with the aim that it can assume, no later than 2024, full financial responsibility for its own security forces...

... Given the persistence of the insurgency and continued slow growth of the Afghan economy, however, full self-sufficiency by 2024 does not appear realistic, even if levels of violence and, with it, the ANDSF force structure, reduce significantly. DoD continues to review the costs of ASFF-funded programs to ensure responsible stewardship of U.S. taxpayers' funds to address long-term affordability of the ANDSF.

...The Afghan Government remains dependent on international support to fund both security and non-security sector costs. Donor nations are working with the Afghan Government to implement economic reforms with a goal to increase economic growth and government revenues. Continued international support for economic development is based on the Afghan Government's progress towards economic and social reforms necessary to remove constraints on private-sector investment to spur economic growth and job creation.

Realistically, however, Afghanistan will remain reliant on the international community to fund its forces, even in a post-reconciliation environment. Afghan government funding for its MoD and MoI forces—about \$500 million per year—is equivalent to about two percent of its GDP and about one fourth of total government revenues. It will be years before the Afghan economy would fully generate sufficient government revenues to finance a peacetime force, even if there was no more risk that terrorist groups could use Afghanistan as a safe haven.

The Impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

What is clear – and is also discussed in more depth in the section of this analysis dealing with Afghanistan's economy – is that these future Afghan funding needs will emerge in a very difficult and different world from the one that existed in formulating the President's FY2021 budget request. So far, it is not possible to accurately estimate even the pressure on most countries grappling with the Coronavirus. Some preliminary estimates are possible for the United States. As of late April 2020, the United States had added some \$3 trillion to the Federal budget to deal with impacts of the Coronavirus.

Preliminary Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and other budget projections indicate a major drop in the projected size of the U.S. gross national product (GNP) and federal revenues in future years because of the Coronavirus crisis, and it is all too likely that these projections will prove to be far more favorable than the reality: ⁸³

- For second quarter of FY2020
 - Inflation-adjusted gross domestic product (real GDP) is expected to decline by about 12 percent during the second quarter, equivalent to a decline at an annual rate of 40 percent for that quarter. The total drop in GDP for the calendar year will be -5.6% and

- The unemployment rate is expected to average close to 14 percent during the second quarter, and 11.4% for the calendar year.
- Interest rates on 3-month Treasury bills and 10-year Treasury notes are expected to average 0.1 percent and 0.6 percent, respectively, during that quarter.
- For entire year of FY 2020, CBO's early look at the fiscal outlook shows the following:
 - The federal budget deficit is projected to be \$3.7 trillion.
 - Federal debt held by the public is projected to be 101 percent of GDP by the end of the fiscal year vs. 79% in 2019.

While the U.S. has not made any official announcements, it is clear that the United States has been planning major further cuts in U.S. spending and aid since at least the start of 2020, when the size of the U.S. defense budget was a relatively minor issue. The United States and its key security partners now face critical financial challenges because of the Coronavirus. By late May 2020, the U.S. has already agreed to provide some \$3.7 trillion in public financial aid. *NBC* also reported in late April 2020 that President Trump was seeking to remove U.S. troops as quickly as possible to minimize their exposure to the Coronavirus.⁸⁴

At the same time, the Coronavirus is having a major impact on Afghanistan and on its military forces. The DoD 1225 report for June 2020 notes that,⁸⁵

The COVID-19 outbreak in Afghanistan posed additional challenges during the second half of this reporting period. As of May 31, 2020, Afghanistan had 14,525 confirmed COVID cases— including more than 40 positive COVID cases in the Afghan Presidential Palace—and 249 COVID-related deaths. The Afghan government implemented several measures to slow the spread of COVID, including instituting lockdowns in Kabul and other areas in the country. The Afghan government also released thousands of prisoners to reduce the potential spread of the virus in Afghan prisons. Additionally, the Afghan government tried to expand testing capabilities and increase the number of treatment facilities for COVID patients. The U.S. Government and other nations, international organization, and non-governmental organizations have also provided financial and other assistance to the Afghan government to help with response efforts. CSTC-A, for example, has used approximately \$16 million of the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) appropriation as of May 25, 2020, for procurement of COVID related medical supplies for the ANDSF, such as gloves, surgical masks, disposable gowns, disposable caps, N95 masks, antiseptic hand sanitizers, and infrared thermometers.

In practice, this almost certainly grossly understates the problems that the Afghan government, Afghan forces, and the Afghan economy will face. In spite of some exaggerated aid claims, Afghanistan has one of the least developed public health and statistically accurate reporting systems in the world. If lack of development and public interaction may slow the impact of the virus, but known cases had reach 32,234 by July 1, 2020, then it was clear that the real number of cases – both in the total population and in the Afghan forces – was rising to far higher levels. The aid issue is not one that only affects donors, it affects Afghan needs.

Making Aid Conditional and Pushing the Implementation of the Peace Plan

These funding pressures may well mean much sharper cuts in U.S. funds for Afghanistan than were originally planned in formulating both the FY2021 budget request and Future Year Defense Plan (FYDP), and even the February peace agreements. Moreover, the increasing willingness of the United States to put financial pressure on the Afghan central government is already clear from recent trends in aid to Afghanistan.

Current U.S. aid has been reduced to \$4.2 billion for direct support of the ANDSF, and economic aid has been reduced to \$532.8 million. In September 2019, the United States also finally made

good on its last threat to make U.S. aid “conditional” and to cut U.S. aid in cases involving major Afghan corruption. It cut aid by \$100 million in reaction to the Afghan central government’s failures in carrying out a hydroelectric power project for Kandahar and Ghazni.⁸⁶

The U.S. has also made it clear that the continued flow of aid is tied to Afghan central government support of the peace process. Secretary of State Pompeo announced on March 23, 2020, that the United States would cut U.S. military aid to Afghanistan by \$1 billion in 2020. The United States also threatened to cut such aid by another \$1 billion in FY2021, if the Afghan government did not reach a political consensus over its national leadership.⁸⁷

While the direct cause of this cut was the feuding over the presidency between Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah that finally did lead to a new compromise of a joint Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah government that is discussed in detail in the next section of this analysis, it was also driven by the lack of Afghan central government support for the peace agreements. The fact that the threat was made is a warning that the United States will push hard for any peace agreement that allows it to leave or that it may leave even if the peace process fails.

The SIGAR report for April 30, 2020 provides a grim summary of the events that led to these U.S. threats as well as warnings about the problems in Afghan governance described later in this report,⁸⁸

Despite U.S. efforts to negotiate a last-minute deal, Kabul hosted the spectacle of two presidential inaugurations on March 9. The New York Times observed that senior U.S. officials, including Ambassador Khalilzad and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) Commander General Austin Scott Miller, attended Ghani’s inauguration, and snubbed Abdullah’s ceremony...Ghani and Abdullah continued their row, to the increased dismay of senior U.S. officials.

On March 11, President Ghani’s spokesperson announced that Ghani had dissolved the office of chief executive, eliminating Abdullah’s government position and nullifying the power-sharing arrangement that had ended the 2014 presidential election dispute between Ghani and Abdullah... On March 18, 11 days after the dueling inaugurations, State’s Senior Bureau Official for South and Central Asian Affairs, Alice G. Wells, called on Afghan leaders to “prioritize and protect unity of the nation” and to end the governance impasse brought on by parallel governments.

... Following Secretary of State Pompeo’s visit to Kabul on March 23, State issued a statement that President Ghani and former Chief Executive Abdullah were unable to agree on an inclusive government despite Secretary Pompeo’s direct plea for compromise. This failure to compromise, disappointed in the two Afghan leaders. Describing this as “a direct threat to U.S. national interests,” Pompeo announced that the United States would immediately reduce U.S. assistance to Afghanistan by \$1 billion in 2020 (with further cuts of \$1 billion possible in 2021).

Secretary Pompeo initially declined to specify which funds would be affected, suggesting, at least initially, that the U.S. would continue to provide support to the Afghan security forces. On March 25, however, Secretary Pompeo told reporters that the United States “is prepared to reduce security assistance” to Afghanistan. (In a January 2018 interview, President Ghani said that Afghanistan could not support its army for more than six months without U.S. funding support and assistance.)

In addition to funding cuts, State said it would:

- initiate a review of all programs and projects to identify additional reductions;
- reconsider pledges to future donor conferences for Afghanistan; and
- not back security operations that are politically motivated, nor support political leaders who order such operations or those who advocate for or support parallel government.

Despite these dramatic threats, State offered to revisit its measures should Afghan leaders form an inclusive government that would participate in the peace process.

Soon after, President Ghani announced in a televised speech that a reduction in U.S. assistance “would not have a direct impact on our key sectors.” The World Bank estimates that international grants finance 75% of Afghanistan’s public expenditures. The United States is the largest source of those grants. State continued to call for an inclusive government and governing arrangement, with Senior Bureau Official for South and Central Asian Affairs, Alice Wells, saying on April 6, “donors are frustrated and fed up by [Afghan political leaders’] personal agendas being advanced ahead of the welfare of the Afghan people.”

The LIG Quarterly report stated that,⁸⁹

On March 9, both Ghani and Abdullah took separate oaths of office as president, and both subsequently declared each other’s office and directives invalid.¹⁶ Secretary of State Michael Pompeo traveled to Kabul at the time of the dispute, and on March 23 issued a statement expressing the United States’ “disappointment” in both leaders’ role in the political impasse.¹⁷ Secretary Pompeo said in the statement that the United States would immediately reduce U.S. assistance to Afghanistan by \$1 billion and would potentially reduce by another \$1 billion in 2021 if Afghan leaders did not form an inclusive government...

Moving U.S. and Allied Forces Towards the Exits

The savings the United States is seeking go far beyond money. They focus on reallocating military manpower and forces – reallocations that are driven in part by the impact of the Coronavirus. The U.S. is already making real force reductions to meet the 14-month deadline, and it is doing so before there is a real peace agreement and plan to implement it.

The U.S. has not publicly stated its full strategy for making such cuts, or what strategy – if any – it will have to guarantee a peace if one is implemented, or that it will adopt if the peace process fails. The Department of Defense 1225 Report for June 2020 does, however, explain part of its current strategy for making force cuts. It provides a detailed picture of U.S. strategy and the organization and structure of the U.S. and the NATO-led Resolute Support mission before the peace agreements. It also describes the changes since the agreements, the following excerpts summarize these developments through June 2020: 90

USFOR-A conducts two complementary missions in Afghanistan: 1) counterterrorism; and 2) training, advising, and assisting the MoD, MoI and ANDSF as part of the RS mission. USFOR-A conducts CT operations to mitigate the threat of AQ, ISIS, and other terrorist groups. USFOR-A works by, with, and through the ANDSF on the CT mission and on operations targeting insurgents. In partnership with NATO Allies and operational partner nations in the RS mission, U.S. forces train, advise, and assist (TAA) the ANDSF. U.S. and coalition forces work with the ANA and the Afghan National Police (ANP) at the “point of need”—that is, to advise ANDSF leaders who are effective leaders and reliable partners in addressing issues that affect the morale, readiness, retention, and operational effectiveness of soldiers and police, such as getting paid, fed, clothed, housed, and equipped to ensure their combat readiness and effectiveness. This also involves continual engagement with MoD and MoI organizations, which have overall responsibility and authority over these matters, to address institutional capacity gaps. In addition, advisors work with the ANDSF to integrate capabilities (e.g., intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and aerial fires) to improve operational planning, execution, and tactical proficiency. U.S. and coalition forces also advise the Afghan Air Force (AAF) and Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) at the tactical level, underscoring the importance of protecting U.S. investments in those two critical capabilities.

An array of operational authorities address circumstances in which U.S. forces may use force in support of the CT and TAA missions, including U.S. accompaniment with and combat enabler support to the ANDSF fight against the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

... The RS Operational Design continued to evolve during the reporting period to address the convergence of peace, security, political complications and degradation of ISIS’s physical territory. The process provides Commander, Resolute Support Mission (COMRS) a mechanism to communicate his operational priorities in support of the RS Mission to protect our collective homelands and create conditions for a political settlement. Regional Targeting Teams (RTT), a new initiative, increased response time and has assisted in the synchronization of regional assets across Afghanistan and is an example of how the process has continued to evolve. During this reporting period, the operational priorities remained flexible to adjust to emerging threats across Afghanistan. The Operational Design concentrated TAA efforts on institutional viability of the ANDSF focusing on the following five items: fixing pay, enhancing maintenance, ensuring distribution of quality food to the forces, appropriate facilities, and distribution of supplies.

From December through February, USFOR-A kinetic operations focused on applying pressure to influence U.S.–Taliban negotiations. An agreed Reduction of Violence (RIV) period followed this effort from February 21-28, 2020. During the RIV, operational focus remained on supporting ANDSF and maintaining awareness through the Crisis Response Group, CSAR, and RTTs, and the five focus areas of institutional viability. During the RIV, CT operations against remnants of ISIS also continued. The successful week of reduced violence, to the lowest levels recorded in Afghanistan since 2016, set the stage for the signing of the U.S.–Taliban Agreement in Doha on February 29, 2020. Following the agreement, the Operational Design continued to prioritize the resourcing of the CRG and institutional viability; essential since the Taliban’s attacks against outlying ANDSF checkpoints resumed after the signing of the agreement. The Operational Design also remained committed to defending the ANDSF and demonstrating our commitment to the GIRoA.

The Operational Design allows COMRS to apply critical assets and focus the RS mission on key areas even as the environment shifts.

...Resolute Support continued TAA optimization, building upon efforts during the last reporting period, to refine TAA efforts to complement the Operational Design priorities and changing environment ... TAA optimization continued to focus on investing advisory efforts on decisive people, places, and processes that can have the greatest impact on ANDSF development; make a positive contribution to campaign objectives; and increase the immediate return on United States and coalition investment. RS designates the people, processes, and locations as “points of need” that require mission essential TAA, and revalidates these designations dynamically to respond to the conditions in the environment. Investing in reliable partners and executing TAA to the point of need are the guiding principles for the TAA mission. RS conducted an optimization of TAA efforts in two periods. From January to February 2020, RS conducted optimizations to HQRS, CSTC-A, and NAC-A. CSTC-A’s role is to TAA Afghan security institutions at the ministerial and national level in Kabul. CSTC-A focused its TAA on key people, places, and processes. During this period, CSTC-A transitioned to a “zone” TAA model at the Afghan Security Institution level; a deliberate reduction in TAA persistence.

... The employment of 3rd SFAB continued to allow the United States Army to conserve an Infantry Brigade Combat Team that would have deployed to provide advisory capability to COMRS. USFOR-A initially employed 3rd SFAB as the headquarters for TAAC-E. In this role, the Brigade advised the 201st ANA Corps to improve their capacity and institutional viability. The brigade’s subordinate units advised MoD and MoI units across Afghanistan from the corps to the battalion level. After realignment during the drawdown of U.S. troops to 8,600, 3rd SFAB HQ assumed the role as Deputy Commanding General-Operations of the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A), and two of its Task Forces assumed responsibility for the eastern and southeastern zones of Afghanistan. The Brigade HQ provides operational level advising to the MoD and MoI at the national level, while the majority of its subordinate elements continue to advise Corps and below formations at the tactical level. 3rd SFAB advising focused on building and sustaining the institutional viability of the ANA, ANP, and other partnered forces. Specifically, 3rd SFAB will continue to assist their partners in developing systems to ensure their supply, maintenance, and personnel functions supported their soldiers effectively. Through these actions, 3rd SFAB had a direct and substantial impact on the ability of ANDSF to sustain their forces both in the current fight, and after the eventual reduction of the RS mission.

On March 1, 2020, following the U.S.–Taliban Agreement in Doha, RS began reducing forces. Resolute Support reduced its requirements to approximately 12,000 personnel while the United States began its reduction to approximately 8,600 personnel. Advising efforts shifted from being more persistent to periodic during this period. This corresponded to the closure of five tactical bases throughout Afghanistan and the reduction in the total number of advisors. Commanders refocused their advisory capability on the “Points of Need” assessing what TAA efforts would prove most effective with reliable partners in the ANDSF. Of all the organizations in the RS mission, NSOCC-A had the least reduction to its advisory efforts enabling it to continue focusing on development of the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF). This optimized TAA strategy continues to enable RS to protect participating nations’ homelands and prevent Afghanistan from being a safe haven for violent extremist organizations.

... During this reporting period, USFOR-A maintained military pressure against insurgents in support of State Department-led reconciliation efforts. This strategy paved the way for a week-long (February 21-28, 2020) reduction in violence (RIV) that culminated with the signing of the U.S.–Taliban Agreement and the U.S.–Afghanistan Joint Declaration on February 29, 2020. Robust U.S.–led Coalition enabling and advisory support to ASSF elements (i.e. ANASOC, GCPSU, and Special Mission Wing (SMW)) was the core of this strategy. ASSF operations effectively sustained military pressure on the Taliban, thwarted ISIS territorial expansion, and mitigated the threat from high profile attack (HPA) networks. In the information space, the Information Warfare Task Force (IWTF) disseminated messaging that highlighted ASSF operational successes, promoted peace and condemned insurgent and terrorist attacks that resulted in civilian casualties and/or undermined the peace process.

During this reporting period, USFOR-A also continued to apply CT pressure in eastern Afghanistan to counter the threat of ISIS-K and other terrorist groups. In addition to unilateral U.S. efforts, USFOR-A enabled the ANDSF to conduct independent CT operations against ISIS. Through independent and partnered

operations, and along with a separate but complementary offensive against the Taliban, the ASSF disrupted ISIS's ability to conduct HPAs in Kabul and disrupted its physical presence in eastern Afghanistan. The United States is encouraging more robust intelligence and operational cooperation among Afghanistan and regional partners to support efforts to defeat ISIS.

U.S. and Afghan forces have maintained pressure on al-Qaida. During the last two years, U.S.- led CT operations have killed numerous AQ leaders and key members, which has disrupted and degraded the group. Moving forward, the United States and Coalition will continue to TAA ASSF as needed to facilitate the eventual conditions-based withdrawal of U.S. Forces and prevent terrorist groups from using Afghan soil to launch attacks against the United States, U.S. interests, or U.S. allies.

Cutting U.S. Military Manpower

The DoD 1225 report for June 2020 also notes that the peace agreements set,⁹¹

A timeline for the conditions-based withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, to 8,600 troops and proportional reduction in the number of allied and Coalition forces 135 days from the signing of the Agreement and a further timeline for the complete withdrawal of all remaining troops by the United States, its allies, and the Coalition within the remaining nine and a half months, provided the Taliban takes action on its obligations under the Agreement.

DoD started implementing the U.S. commitments under the U.S.-Taliban Agreement during this reporting period. As part of this implementation, U.S. forces have been conducting the initial phase of the troop reduction. U.S. forces will continue to draw down and adjust to the operational environment in implementation of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement. The RS Mission also continues to evolve to respond to changes in the operational environment and to protect Coalition Forces, partner nations, and the ANDSF.

The U.S. will cut its forces from 14,000 at the start of the year, and 13,000 in early June, to 8,600 in mid-July. These cuts, however, affect far more than the number of troops. The U.S. and its allies will shut bases and facilities. They will withdraw air strike and IS&R capabilities, and they will cut more civilian contractors in Afghanistan than their troops – including some 5,000 Afghan contractors working for U.S. forces.⁹²

The agreement states that all military forces of the America's Coalition partners will withdraw, including all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and support services personnel, from Afghanistan within the same 14 months following the announcement of the agreement.⁹³

The United States has announced that it has reduced its officially reported military and defense civilian manning from 102,077 in September 2011; to 43,082 in June 2014; and to 13,333 in June 2017.⁹⁴ The United States has classified its military manning levels in Afghanistan since 2017 but has made it clear that it is seeking to cut its publicly-stated troop levels from some 12,000 at the start of 2020, to 8,600 as soon as possible.⁹⁵

This effort will evidently include a large number of forward-deployed train and assist personnel. It also is reducing the U.S. military presence in the field, as the U.S. has "worked to 'optimize' its force, including U.S. military personnel, civilians, and contractors in Afghanistan, between November 15, 2019, and March 18, 2020. According to CSTC-A, this optimization was achieved by using multifunctional advisors: single individuals who train, advise, and assist multiple ANDSF personnel and units which had previously had multiple advisors."⁹⁶

Press reports have indicated that the Trump Administration has considered five different options for withdrawal – one involving major or "total" withdrawals before the November election. None of these options have been made public, but the U.S. is currently on track for an accelerated timeline of its troop withdrawal and reached the 8,600 goal by June 2020. According to an

anonymous U.S. official based in Kabul, “the drawdown by the U.S. was expected to be done in 135 days but it’s clear that they have almost completed the process in just about 90 days.”⁹⁷

As of June 19, 2020, the U.S. had successfully completed the troop drawdown to 8,600 according to General Frank McKenzie who leads the US. Central Command.⁹⁸ During his discussion with the Aspen Strategy Group, McKenzie also stated that the full withdrawal in 14 months would depend on the Taliban. They would have to show that they have severed their ties with al Qaeda and that they would engage with the Afghan central government. However, the ultimate decision to either keep with the current schedule or slow it down will rely on President Trump or any successor.

The Coronavirus crisis has also become an added incentive for the U.S. to withdraw non-essential personnel or those that are high-risk of contracting the virus. According to another anonymous U.S. officials based in Kabul, “Due to COVID-19 concerns, we are moving towards that planned drawdown faster than anticipated.”⁹⁹

The ongoing cuts will have a critical impact on Afghan force development because it is the U.S. “train and assist” units that are deployed in the forward support with Afghan land combat units that have been critical in enabling Afghan forces to defend or successfully counterattack Taliban units. Moreover, additional forward deployed Special Forces, other elite forces, and CIA elements have played a key role in supporting Afghan counterterrorism forces.

Cutting Allied Military Manpower

The SIGAR *Quarterly Report for April 30, 2020* provides the following additional information regarding the linkage between U.S. and allied force cuts,¹⁰⁰

The United States committed to a conditional withdrawal of “all military forces of the United States, its allies, and Coalition partners, including all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel” from Afghanistan within 14 months (ending April 29/30, 2021).

...As the first step, the United States pledged without any stated conditions to reduce its forces to 8,600 personnel (with proportional reductions from other Coalition forces) and completely withdraw from five military bases within the first 135 days (ending July 13–14, 2020). Contingent upon the Taliban fulfilling their counterterrorism commitments, the United States, its allies, and other Coalition forces would complete the withdrawal of the remaining forces and depart from all remaining bases within the remaining nine and a half months.

According to State, the agreement expressly commits the Taliban to enter intra-Afghan negotiations to determine the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire and reach an agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan. Senior U.S. administration officials clarified that the timeline in the U.S.-Taliban agreement for the withdrawal of international military forces is not conditioned on the Taliban’s achievement of any particular political outcomes associated with Afghanistan’s negotiated future (such as status of women’s rights), as ultimately it is up to the Afghan parties to determine in intra-Afghan negotiations what the political roadmap should look like.

Rather, the withdrawal timeline depends on whether the Taliban fulfill their counterterrorism commitments under the agreement to prevent any group or individual, including al-Qaeda, from using Afghan soil to attack or threaten the security of the United States and its allies, and their good-faith participation in intra-Afghan negotiations commitments...These officials further clarified that the timeline for the withdrawal of international forces is “aspirational,” dryly observing that “nothing [in Afghanistan] happens on schedule.”

It is not clear how quickly such cuts will affect the size of allied force commitments, but **Chart Ten** shows that NATO reported in February 2020 that it had 16,551 military personnel from 38 countries in Afghanistan.

The United States was reported to have 8,000 or 48% of the NATO total – although this was only part of the U.S. total in the country and did not include contractors and civilian intelligence personnel – and this total also did not include air warfare and support personnel outside Afghanistan.

In addition to reducing the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan to 8,600 by mid-July, there will be major reductions in the 8,551 allied forces that were assigned to the Resolute Support missions in February 2020, and the coalition will withdraw from five unspecified military bases by July 13, 2020.¹⁰¹

Other major contributors included Australia (200), the Czech Republic (309), Georgia (871), Germany (1,300), Italy (895), Mongolia (233), Poland (350), Romania (797), Turkey (60), and the United Kingdom (1,100).¹⁰² The peace agreements call for all of these forces, and those of other U.S. allies to be gone by May 2021.

These cuts will have a major impact on allied support of Afghan forces because Germany, Italy, Turkey and the U.S. all serve as the RSM “framework nations.” Each leads a regional Train, Advise, and Assist Command (TAAC) that is responsible for coordinating support and capabilities within its respective command region. Germany had 1,300 troops assigned in February 2020, Italy had 895, and Turkey had 600. Task Force (TF) Southeast and TF Southwest conduct TAA missions with the ANDSF, but are not formally part of the RS mission.¹⁰³

The regional TAACs cover five of the seven ANA Corps and some Afghan National Police (ANP) provincial headquarters. TF Southeast and TF Southwest oversee persistent advising with the Afghan National Army (ANA) 203rd and 215th Corps, respectively. The TAACs and TFs serve as the principal connections between the Afghan ministries and fielded forces. The field commands play a central role in the coalition’s ability to assess the efficacy of its ministerial advising efforts, to determine the ministries’ ability to support ongoing ANDSF security operations, and to provide an outer ring of sensors and security for the coalition. In addition, coalition forces provide limited non-combat enabler support, primarily ISR and MEDEVAC, to the ANDSF as the Afghans continue to field and develop their organic capabilities.¹⁰⁴

While the pace of such cuts is unclear, allied nations that have supported the international command and forces because of political ties to the U.S. are unlikely to stay any longer than the United States, and may well withdraw more quickly on their own schedules – particularly given the financial pressures created by the Coronavirus crisis and the domestic political blowback from staying longer than the United States with the risks of taking any casualties.

Moreover, the history of past peace agreements warns that both the U.S. and other donors rarely actually meet their military and civil aid commitments once they no longer actively participate in a conflict and/or see a conflict which loses its strategic priority. In the past, USAID has developed and circulated graphs tracing the speed with which aid goes down once a crisis is over, and they serve as an important warning. Many pledges and commitments may not be met – particularly if the new Afghan government proves to be as corrupt or ineffective as the present government or the Taliban can impose its own ideology – either politically or by force.

Chart Ten: Resolute Support Mission Troop-Contributing Nations, as of February 2020

	Albania	99		Germany	1,300		Poland	350
	Armenia	121		Greece	11		Portugal	188
	Australia	200		Hungary	95		Romania	797
	Austria	15		Italy	895		Slovakia	51
	Azerbaijan	120		Latvia	40		Slovenia	8
	Belgium	93		Lithuania	50		Spain	68
	Bosnia-Herzegovina	68		Luxembourg	2		Sweden	25
	Bulgaria	158		Mongolia	233		Turkey	600
	Croatia	107		Montenegro	27		Ukraine	21
	Czech Republic	309		Netherlands	160		United Kingdom	1,100
	Denmark	155		New Zealand	9		United States	8,000
	Estonia	42		North Macedonia	44			
	Finland	63		Norway	58			
	Georgia	871						
						Total		16,551

Source: *Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan*, Report to Congress in Accordance with Section 1225 of the National Defense Authorization Act, June 2020, p. 9.

Cutting U.S. Defense Contractors

By April 2020, the United States was also now cutting 1,000 defense contractors with U.S. citizenship out of the total of more than 26,000 defense contractors in Afghanistan. These defense contractors had long outnumbered the uniformed U.S. military, and included more than 10,500 U.S. citizens at the start of 2020.¹⁰⁵

The SIGAR *Quarterly Report* stated that,¹⁰⁶

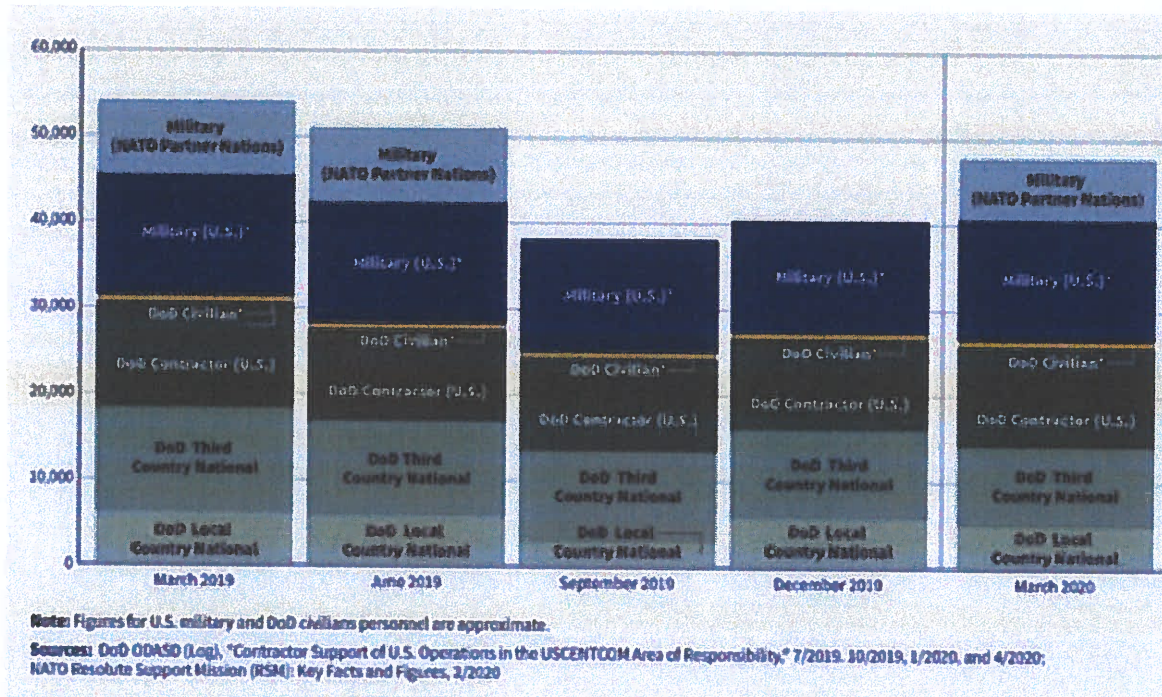
...DOD contractors...provide essential in-country support to U.S. forces and the ANDSF. As of April 2020, 27,641 contractors were serving in Afghanistan, about 40% (11,077) of whom were third-country nationals, 39% (10,711) were U.S. citizens, and 21% (5,853) were local nationals, or more than twice the number of U.S. troops currently in country. These contractors fulfill an array of important responsibilities, with most providing logistics and maintenance support (34%), security (19%), and support for U.S. military bases (14%), and the rest providing construction, translation and interpretation, transportation, training, and other services.

The LIG *Quarterly Report* gave the same total for contractors as SIGAR, and provided the data shown in **Chart Eleven**. It did not provide details on the cuts in contractors beyond the Chart, but reported that,¹⁰⁷

CSTC-A stated... that it had worked to “optimize” its force, including U.S. military personnel, civilians, and contractors in Afghanistan, between November 15, 2019, and March 18, 2020. According to CSTC-A, this optimization was achieved by using multifunctional advisors: single individuals who train, advise, and assist multiple ANDSF personnel and units which had previously had multiple advisors.³⁴⁴ CSTC-A stated that this enabled it to reduce 50 military personnel, 12 civilians, and 31 contractor positions. However, the contractor numbers remain in flux due to contract structures and the processes by which the scopes of the contracts are reduced.

The United States has now set the goal of totally eliminating all such defense contractors in the 14 months it will take to remove U.S. military personnel. While no clear numbers have been announced, it is also making major cuts in its diplomatic and civilian staffs, and also evidently in CIA personnel.

Chart Eleven: Total Personnel Supporting DoD Efforts in Afghanistan, March 2019 Through March 2020



Lead Inspector General (LIG), *Quarterly Report to Congress on Operation Freedom's Sentinel*, January 1, 2020-March 31, 2020, May 19, 2020. [lead_inspector_general_for_operation_freedoms_sentinel.pdf](#), p. 45.

Cutting U.S. Combat Air Support

What the United States has not publicly addressed are its plans to cut air support of Afghan forces from bases inside and outside of Afghanistan. While most commentary focuses on the number of U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan, it is the use of manned and unmanned U.S. combat airpower to support Afghan forces that has been the most critical element of direct U.S. combat action since 2015.

Chart Twelve shows that the number of U.S. strike sorties that actually released a weapon climbed from 411 in 2015; to 1,248 in 2017; and to 2,434 in 2019. Open source data only cover the first two months of 2020, but the sortie numbers were just as high in the correlating months of 2019. The United States has also continued to fly high numbers of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (IS&R) sorties as well. It has flown some 13,000 to 21,000 such sorties a year since 2015, and it flew nearly 2,600 in the first two months of 2020.¹⁰⁸

These strikes have been targeted using one of the most sophisticated IS&R networks in the world, alongside large numbers of unmanned and persistent vehicle systems that are not counted in Chart Ten, as well as the fusion of other U.S. intelligence assets, including satellites – capabilities that will not be available to the ANDSF in anything approaching the same form. Their effectiveness is shown in the UN report issued in May 2020,¹⁰⁹

The Taliban leadership also incurred losses resulting from increased air strikes and night raids carried out by Afghan and United States forces. Taliban commanders that were successfully targeted in operations include Mullah Abdul Bari... the shadow governor for Farah, killed together with Mullah Sadiq and Mawlawi Sayyed, in early August 2019, Haji Lala, the shadow governor for Logar Province, on 28 June, Abdul Ahad (aka Zulfiqar), the deputy shadow governor for Panjshir Province, on 3 August, Malawi Mohamadullah, the shadow district governor for Azra, Logar Province, on 17 August, Qari Fasehuddin, shadow governor for Badakhshan, in early September, Mawlawi Nooruddin, the shadow governor for Samangan Province, on 15 September, Zain-Alabidin, the shadow governor for Laghman, on 27 December and Wali Jan (aka Hamza), the shadow governor for Wardak, on 12 April 2020...

Monitoring Team interlocutors also confirmed the killing of Mullah Nangalai in a United States drone strike, along with 15 other Taliban from the Mullah Rasul splinter group, also known as the High Council of the Afghanistan Islamic Emirate. Mullah Nangalai had been fighting against mainstream Taliban forces under Mullah Abdul Samad in the contested area of Zerkoh Valley of Shindand District, Herat Province, since late 2015.

As is the case with land forces, the United States would have to close all of its air bases by some point in May 2021 to meet the 14-month deadline if the peace agreements are actually implemented. The United States could potentially still fly strike sorties and use cruise missiles from carriers or from bases like Al Udeid in Qatar, but any such actions would place major operational limits on U.S. capabilities and imply the collapse of key elements of the peace process. Like land forces, projecting U.S. airpower back into Afghanistan once U.S. bases, support capabilities, contract support, and logistic supply routes are closed would be a major and time-consuming effort.

Chart Twelve: Combined Forces Airpower Statistics: 2013-2019

OPERATION FREEDOM'S SENTINEL/RESOLUTE SUPPORT MISSION

Strike Aircraft (manned)

Sorties

2014

12,978

2015

5,774

2016

5,162

2017

4,603

2018

8,196

2019

8,773

2020

1,210

Sorties with at least one weapon release

2014

1,136

2015

411

2016

615

2017

1,248

2018

966

2019

2,434

2020

247

Number of Weapons Released (Manned & RPA strike assets)

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

Nov

Dec

Total

2014

92

114

95

115

164

272

205

437

441

217

87

126

2,365

2015

40

30

47

31

41

109

79

156

111

203

69

31

947

2016

127

115

58

62

89

94

160

108

162

205

92

65

1,337

2017

54

200

203

460

328

389

350

503

414

653

352

455

4,361

2018

378

469

339

562

591

572

746

715

841

769

841

539

7,362

2019

463

327

673

548

635

441

613

783

948

777

519

696

7,423

2020

415

360

775

Statistics provided includes numbers of sorties (not strikes) and munitions expended by aircraft under CFACC control

2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

2019

2020

Intel, Surveillance and Recon Sorties

32,999

21,634

19,681

15,404

12,716

17,723

2,595

Airlift and Airdrop Sorties

17,040

6,900

10,300

11,166

12,783

10,926

2,340

Airlift Cargo (Short Tons)

158,400

50,000

69,200

84,208

89,584

79,705

17,642

Airlift Passengers

202,700

78,000

111,100

120,554

150,330

141,294

21,907

Supplies Airdropped (Pounds)

28,000

0

0

33,423

667,880

606,600

62,500

Tanker Sorties

9,085

5,323

4,910

5,714

4,673

2,637

338

Fuel Offloaded (Millions of Pounds)

636

201

150

170

189

99

19

Aircraft Refuelings

46,793

26,162

18,137

17,989

19,214

12,877

2,065

Source: Combined Forces Air Component Commander, "2013-2019 Airpower Statistics, as of February 29, 2020," AFCENT (CAOC) Public Affairs, afcent.pa@afcent.af.mil.

Afghan Politics: Making Peace Efforts a Self-Inflicted Wound?

The previous analysis has shown that the United States has signed peace agreements that may well fail because of the Taliban and the schedule for cutting U.S. and allied forces is so fast it would make forging an actual peace difficult to impossible. However, the U.S. faces other major challenges. These include dealing with a partner in the Afghan central government that is weak, divided, corrupt, and incompetent. They include dealing with a country that lacks the quality of governance and economic development to maintain a stable peace, and they will have to adapt Afghan forces to either maintain the peace or fight largely on their own.

They also include Afghan politics that are so divisive that they alone pose a major challenge and sharply increase the risk that giving the central government more time will do nothing more than prolong the agony. The U.S. is dealing with an Afghan government with a long history of dysfunctional political divisions. Afghanistan's first post-Taliban President, Hamid Karzai, served from December 22, 2001 to September 29, 2014. He succeeded in staying in power largely because of his constant effort to juggle one set of power brokers against another in a country where multiple factions were divided by tribe, sect, ethnicity, family, region, city, and even valley.

After 2014, the situation grew far worse. As a result of the rapid withdrawal of most U.S. forces in 2014, the central government has steadily lost the ability to govern outside of Afghanistan's major population centers; provide even limited steps to control the growth of a narcoeconomy; control power brokers and warlords; administrate programs in the field; and provide key services like policing, education, medical care, and ensuring the rights of women.¹¹⁰

Karzai's departure in 2014 led to an election where two figures – Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah – both claimed to have been elected President in a dubious and partly rigged election. They only agreed to cooperate after a U.S. negotiated settlement between the two leaders determined that Ghani would be made president and Abdullah Abdullah would be the equivalent of a CEO.

This system has repeatedly come close to collapse in the years that followed. Loyalties within the separate Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah factions have proved uncertain, and compromises – over the control of territory, government funds, or major political appointments that did not have the support of outside power brokers – have failed or been fragile at best. The Afghan legislature has had little meaningful control over state funds, and little real effectiveness.

Public Opinion versus Political Reality

These problems need to be kept in perspective. Public opinion polling by the Asia Foundation indicates that the Afghan people have a surprisingly high level of faith in their political system and government in spite of its failures. This polling result is not that unusual. One of the oddities in public opinion polling in failed states is the degree to which a large percentage of the population preserves its hopes for the future and its support of the government.

There are limits to such polls. The Asia Foundation poll was taken in 2019, before the full impact of the Presidential election crisis – and the split between Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah – became apparent. It was also taken in one of the least developed countries in the world, nearly 50 years after the collapse of the monarchy, and in a country where the vast majority of the living population had never known any form of an effective government.

The poll also found that the Afghan people were not optimistic about the future, even though they were somewhat hopeful about a peace settlement: ¹¹¹

Optimism about the nation's direction was at its highest in 2013, before declining, year by year, to an all-time low in 2016 over concerns about the economy, difficult elections, and the effects of radical reductions in foreign troops. This year, 36.1% of respondents say the country is going in the right direction, up from 32.8% last year, while 58.2% say the country is going in the wrong direction, down slightly from 61.3% in 2018.

Findings reveal the impact that peace talks have had on optimism in the country. While optimism in 2018, at 32.8%, was effectively unchanged from 2017, Afghans this year report a slightly higher level of optimism, with 36.1% of respondents saying the country is going in the right direction, and in explaining reasons for their optimism, those who say "peace / end of war" has increased notably from 16.4% to 26.3% this year.

Even though it took place between the election crisis, it also found that the Afghan people saw major problems in the Afghan electoral system, ¹¹²

A majority of Afghans (50.4%) say that fraud undermines free and fair elections, followed by corruption (14.9%) and insecurity (9.0%). Public expressions of concern over electoral fraud, corruption, and mismanagement, however, do not seem to have altered Afghans' assessment of elections: there has been no change over the last year in the number of Afghans who believe that the next elections will be free and fair—52.4% in 2018; 52.3% in 2019.

Nevertheless, the poll still found that the people still had hope that their political system and government would become more effective: ¹¹³

More than half of Afghans, 65.1%, are either very or somewhat satisfied with the way democracy works in Afghanistan. This represents a 3.7 percentage point increase over 2018. It should be noted that presidential elections had not taken place yet before the 2019 Survey, and in 2018 parliamentary elections had not taken place, however, for 2019, respondents have the parliamentary elections to refer back to when considering if they feel democracy works. A majority of Afghans (57.9%) continue to believe that it is safe to publicly criticize the government, up from 55.6% in 2018.

...The number of Afghans who believe that they can have some or a lot of influence over local (district/provincial) government decisions has increased since 2018, from 52.9% to 54.2%. This is the second-highest figure in Survey history, exceeded only in 2014 (55.9%), and it continues the trend of year-on-year increases since 2016.

...This year, 57.4% of respondents say that religious leaders should be consulted in politics. This is a decline of almost 3 percentage points from 2018 and the second-lowest figure since the Survey first asked this question, in 2006. Some 40.0% say that religious leaders should not be involved in politics, an increase of almost 2.3 percentage points over 2018 and the second-highest figure since the Survey first asked this question, in 2006.

There is no way to know how the perceptions of the Afghan people have changed since the poll was taken, but there are reasons to believe that – despite all of the negative elements in these polling results – they may still be more optimistic than the performance that the Afghan politicians and the Afghan government can justify.

An Afghan Central Government Political Leadership that Would Rather Be Hanged Separately than Hang Together

As has been touched upon earlier, a major new crisis occurred in the second-round contest for the Presidency between Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah in the election that was held on September 28, 2019. The result was too uncertain and corrupt to make either candidate president, and it created further divisions within the Afghan central government that had a major impact on impact on the peace process.

Both the SIGAR and LIG *Quarterly Reports* for January 1-March 30, 2020 highlight the lack of unity within the Afghan government during one of the most critical periods of the U.S. negotiations

with the Taliban, and the lack of even a cosmetic unity in the Afghan central government at the time when the peace agreements were signed.

The LIG report summarized this situation as follows, and made it clear that the U.S. government knew how fragile and tentative the peace effort had become:¹¹⁴

As the United States and Taliban were negotiating the agreement, the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC) on February 18 declared incumbent president Ashraf Ghani the winner of the September 2019 presidential election.¹⁴ Ghani's primary challenger, former Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, immediately disputed the results, asserting that the IEC was corrupt and had not properly counted all of the ballots...

On March 9th, both Ghani and Abdullah took separate oaths of office as president, and both subsequently declared each other's office and directives invalid. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo traveled to Kabul at the time of the dispute, and on March 23 issued a statement expressing the United States' "disappointment" in both leaders' role in the political impasse. Secretary Pompeo said in the statement that the United States would immediately reduce U.S. assistance to Afghanistan by \$1 billion and would potentially reduce by another \$1 billion in 2021 if Afghan leaders did not form an inclusive government.

The United States and the Taliban agreed that following the signing of their agreement, the Taliban would begin negotiations with the Afghan government to resolve the ongoing conflict... However, the Taliban and the Afghan government made little progress during the quarter due to disputes between the parties over the negotiating teams and then over prisoner releases. The political infighting between Afghan government leaders, the Taliban history of rejecting the legitimacy of the Afghan government, and the Taliban's surge in violence against Afghan forces in March, raise questions about the prospects for Taliban and Afghan government to come to of rejecting the legitimacy of the Afghan government, and the Taliban's surge in violence against Afghan forces in March, raise questions about the prospects for Taliban and Afghan government to come to agreement.

In the first contest between the two men, the U.S. was able persuade them to split power – making Ghani President and Abdullah Abdullah CEO. The end result was an awkward compromise, but at least allowed the government to function. This time, the United States could not persuade the two rivals to reach a relatively quick compromise. As the LIG also reports, this led to both a lack of any consensus over the central government's leadership and a crisis that led Secretary Pompeo to make the major aid cuts referred to earlier.¹¹⁵

On February 19, the Independent Election Committee (IEC) declared incumbent Afghan President Ashraf Ghani the winner of the September 2019 presidential election... The IEC made the announcement after a lengthy recount and complaint resolution process administered by another election management body, the Electoral Complaints Commission. Despite the IEC's declaration of Ghani's victory, the election's second-place finisher, Abdullah Abdullah, who served as Chief Executive Officer of the Afghan government under President Ghani during the Government of National Unity from 2014 to 2020, declared that he had actually won the election and would form a parallel government. Abdullah stated that the announced election results were the result of fraud, which his campaign had attempted to redress via electoral complaints filed with the Electoral Complaints Commission. Abdullah supporters also blocked IEC recounts in several provinces in late 2019 based upon the same complaints before agreeing to permit their completion. On March 9, both Abdullah and Ghani held rival swearing-in ceremonies in Kabul. Ghani's ceremony came under attack by ISIS-K rockets....

The political impasse complicates the Afghan government's efforts to prepare for peace negotiations with the Taliban. The DoS stated that U.S. officials urged all presidential candidates to eschew violence or threats of violence during and after the election. The DoS stated that the U.S. Government is strongly opposed to the formation of a parallel Afghan government and urged all parties to compromise and form an inclusive government that can meet the challenges of governance, peace, and security, and provide for the health and welfare of Afghan citizens. According to the DoS, Secretary Pompeo, Ambassador Khalilzad, and other senior U.S. officials have emphasized to Ghani and Abdullah that the United States expects them to resolve the impasse between themselves, without U.S. intervention.

On March 23, Secretary Pompeo released a press statement announcing the reduction of U.S. assistance to Afghanistan by \$1 billion as a result of the impasse, describing the failure of Ghani and Abdullah to come to an agreement as “disappointing.” Secretary Pompeo’s statement added that the U.S. Government could reduce assistance in 2021 by another \$1 billion if the Afghans prove unable to find a political resolution.

An Uncertain Compromise and a New Form of Divided Afghan Government

Political pressure – and the threat of a two billion dollar cut in U.S. aid – did eventually lead President Ashraf Ghani and his rival Dr. Abdullah Abdullah to agree to a new power-sharing agreement on May 17, 2020. The agreement allowed Abdullah and Ghani to each nominate half the cabinet, including key ministries and provincial governors, based on a rule agreed upon by the two sides. Ghani remained president while Abdullah became the head of the peace effort and a new body named the High Council for National Reconciliation – alongside a number of other major government reforms including the ability to pick half of Ghani’s cabinet.¹¹⁶

This High Council of National Reconciliation was said to have been established to create national, regional, and international consensus on peace affairs; to attract international assistance and support for better coordination of the peace effort; and to attract international assistance for post-peace reconstruction efforts. Abdullah was not given any key role like the office of the chief executive that he held in the previous government. His role was to focus on the reconciliation process.

An article in TOLO news – that seemed to have been broadly accurate – stated that,¹¹⁷

High Council of National Reconciliation led by Abdullah Abdullah, from which he can issue executive orders. The council will have five deputies from the two teams. The council members will be selected by the director in consultation with the president, political leaders, people from the two sides, speakers of the parliament houses and the civil society and elites, according to the agreement.

Based on the agreement, Abdullah will lead the peace process, the meetings of the reconciliation council, and he will appoint its members and employees, including the employees of the State Ministry for Peace Affairs....The council itself has been given the authority to specify, approve and lead all affairs related to the peace process, the agreement says. The decisions and enactments at the council will be made by a majority of votes of its members.

The decisions and enactments made by the High Council of National Reconciliation are final and they should be implemented, the agreement said. The agreement says that the council will provide guidance to the negotiation team through its leadership committee. The duty of the council is to create national, regional and international consensus on peace, attract international support for peace, and attract international support and assistance for post-peace reconstruction efforts.

According to the agreement, Abdullah will lead the council and he will receive the same security and protocol privileges as the number two person in the country. The council will be an independent budgetary unit, based on the agreement, and will be funded by the government, but it will also receive financial support from the international community. The head of the council, Abdullah Abdullah, will have the full authority over the spending of the budget of the reconciliation council and the expenses are not exempted from assessment, the agreement says.

The council will be comprised of political leaders, national figures, representatives of the houses of the parliament, representatives of different political and community layers, the civil society, and women and youth, the agreement says. The High Council of National Reconciliation will have two sections: (1) The general assembly, and (2) the leadership committee.

The agreement also mentions reforms in the electoral process, which include changing the system of the elections, the holding of provincial council and district council elections, the use of the biometric system, and amending the law on political parties in accordance with electoral reforms.

The agreement says a five-member monitoring team will be established to oversee the implementation of the agreement and prevent any violations. If the team finds a violation, it will solve it through understanding and will report its findings to the president and the head of the reconciliation council.

A key part of the agreement is the participation of Abdullah's team in the government. This matter has been one of the main topics of the discussions between the two sides. Based on the agreement, Abdullah will have the authority to appoint 50 percent of the cabinet, including key ministries.

Sources said the ministries of Interior Affairs; Justice, Labor and Social Affairs; Refugees and Repatriation; Transportation; Economy; Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock; Higher Education; Borders and Tribal Affairs; Industry and Commerce; and the Ministry of Telecommunication and Information Technology have been offered to Abdullah by President Ghani. The agreement says that the rank of marshal should be given to the former vice president Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum. He should also be given the membership of the High Council of Government and the National Security Council, said the plan.

The agreement mentions that the provincial governors will be appointed based on a rule agreed upon by both sides. And appointments and removals should be made based on justifiable reasons, and new appointees should be made based on merit and legal conditions.

Part of the agreement mentions that those political leaders who have been engaged in the peace process should be appreciated. These leaders include former High Peace Council (HPC) chief and former president Burhanuddin Rabbani who was killed in a suicide attack in 2011, his son, Salahuddin Rabbani, who also served as HPC chief and foreign affairs minister, the former head of HPC, Sayed Ahmad Gailani, who died in 2017, and the incumbent HPC chief Mohammad Karim Khalili.

Abdullah Abdullah issued a statement saying that the agreement, ¹¹⁸

"... comes at a very difficult time when we face serious threats. It's meant to ensure a path to peace, improve governance, protect rights, respect laws and values," he said in a series of tweets...As we commit to form a more inclusive, accountable and competent administration, we are also reminded of the hard lessons to respect laws, fight the Coronavirus, fraud, injustice and corruption. We now need to come together as a nation, strive to seek solutions that are practical..."

U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad issued an equally reassuring agreement that welcomed what he called a compromise and wished the new government success.¹¹⁹

"The US is prepared to partner with the new govt in a peace process that ends the war. That process must be based on timely implementation of commitments made to date. Both leaders should not repeat mistakes in governing that existed under NUG, as Afghans negotiated this govt," Khalilzad tweeted. He said it is high time to take seriously the resolve of the Afghan people, and the world, to finally see an end to this conflict, urging Abdullah to move forward with full speed and urgency, and be sincerely supported therein by the current Afghan government. Pakistan on Sunday welcomed the signing of the agreement between political leaders regarding formation of inclusive government and High Council of National Reconciliation."

Reassuring platitudes aside, this power sharing agreement has been uncertain at best. The U.S. has pushed for political reconciliation within the central government to speed up peace negotiations with the Taliban, and it has used cuts in aid to force the compromise. Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah have become open rivals and head the equivalent of two different governments where each has given positions to their supporters to gain leverage and power at the expense of more capable and honest choices.

The new version of a Ghani-Abdullah Abdullah government seems no better than the old one, and it may be even less likely to fully control Afghan power brokers. The fact that Abdullah Abdullah's side will take the lead in negotiating with the Taliban could split the government's approach to a peace agreement, and the awkward compromises between the two rivals could mean that any new government would be composed of rival factions on the central government side. In many ways,

the new agreement is all too close to the divisions that empowered the rise of the Taliban in the first place.

Abdullah Abdullah, for example, has promoted Uzbek leader, Abdul Rashid Dostum, a former general and Vice President, to Field Marshall and has given him membership to both the High Council of Government and the National Security Council, in spite of rape charges and a past which is questionable at best. It seems clear that a number of appointments were made more to reward each leader's support rather than to choose the best appointee. At the same time, it is unclear how long the two rivals will be able to keep up the appearance of peace after the U.S. backing ceases.

President Ashraf Ghani has made his own efforts to use the government to gain the support of major power brokers. On June 1, 2020, Ghani issued a decree that made Mahmoud Karzai the acting minister of urban development and land. Karzai had been a key figure behind the collapse of the Kabul Bank, and the former acting minister – Jawad Paikar – had been dismissed from his job over reports of misusing his official authority.¹²⁰

According to Tolo news, this led John Sopko – the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) – to comment that,¹²¹

One of the masterminds behind the failure of the largest Afghan bank—Kabul Bank—is now currently under consideration to oversee a major Afghan government agency, if that is true, it seems that we are taking a step back and Afghanistan is step backwards, not step forward...we hope to see in the Afghan government's efforts when we do this report (new SIGAR report on corruption) would include addressing the backlog of important corruption cases that the Afghan government is aware of, but has not done anything about it—and I would say just one example there has been on case sitting for over six years dealing with hundreds of millions of dollars lost to the US and Afghan government.

These appointments made it all too clear that the new government remained a power struggle, and that it was dominated by rival power brokers rather than effective officials. It also made it clear that if elections are the benchmark of legitimacy, the Afghan central government had not met that test for more than half a decade, and post-Taliban Afghanistan has never really been a truly functioning democracy.

Worse, post-Taliban Afghanistan has never had a truly functional government. While it does have honest and capable officials, it also has had all too many that are not. It has been led by a government divided into factions at every level – from capital, to province, to district, and even at the level of town or city – each with its own mix of power brokers and warlords.

The end result is that there are all too many reasons to doubt the Afghan central government's ability to achieve enough real unity and leadership to actually negotiate successfully. It is brutally clear that there is no current leader that can quickly unify even the support of the central government. Loyalties even within the present Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah factions are uncertain. Any compromise – over territory, government funds, or major political appointments that brought the Taliban to power or that did not have the support of such power brokers – could break down or trigger new power struggles within the new form of government. Such disputes are more the rule in divided developing states than the exception.

A Divided Taliban that Will Create Problems of Its Own

The other side of these uncertainties is the Taliban. A successful peace agreement will almost certainly require the Taliban to actively participate in both the political process and the government. So far, there has been little indication of how this would occur, what changes would result, and how the resulting new structure of politics and government would operate – although there now is roughly a year left of the 14-month deadline, and some form of structure is supposed to be operational by May 2021.

As cases like South Sudan show, creating such a government is difficult even if the only issue concerns divisions over power and wealth. A joint Afghan central-Taliban government would have to combine two elements with different values on issue after issue. The past election problems would be minor if elections were held. Any major territorial divisions or forms of “federalism” would be an invitation to dividing the country and resuming the war. Combining a relatively modern structure of central government values focused on secular governance with a neo-Salafi set of religious and ideological values would have to take place in a nation dependent on outside aid, income from narcotics exports, and its own regional, tribal, ethnic, sectarian, and power broker divisions.

In the case of the Taliban, there is no longer a single charismatic leader. The Taliban is now a divided and scattered movement where it is unclear how many Taliban fighters (and fighters of other factions) support a leadership with divisions of its own. As is noted earlier in this assessment, it is also a movement that has continued to attack Afghan central government forces outside of negotiated areas agreed upon with the United States, and whose public statements raise serious question about any real commitment to joining in a fight against terrorist movements.

The current leadership council is still composed of the older members that established the movement after the 2001 U.S. invasion. However, the Taliban’s militant off-shoot, the Haqqani Network, has created a separation between the old political wing and the younger military wing of the Taliban.

The Taliban also no longer has a charismatic leader like Mullah Mohammed Omar. The current leader of the Taliban is Mullah Haibatullah Akhunzada, but his functions as Amir are focused more on the spiritual and political role rather than on a role as an operational commander. He operates alongside two deputies and the leadership council, called the Rahbari Shura or Quetta Shura, which appoints provincial governors and commissions.

However, there are smaller equivalents of “Shuras” for some provinces, and the Taliban’s organization in each district – whether it actually controls or disputes control over the area – varies depending on the level of control and support by the locals, which leads to a significant degree of autonomy for each provincial commander. This decentralized nature of the current Taliban’s leadership structure will prove problematic if a peace is agreed upon, forcing each branch of the Taliban’s operational commander to reorganize into a more formalized chain of command.

The divided structure of the Taliban is apparent in the way the Taliban has been holding peace negotiations. Although Mullah Baradar is the face and leader of the Taliban’s negotiations, he has struggled to control the various cells of the movement, even issuing ultimatums to the military wing. The negotiations themselves are painstaking for Taliban commanders who must ensure the terms of the peace negotiations do not cause a rebellion among their ranks.

Here again, recent UN reporting provides major insights into the Taliban's structure and its links to al Qaeda, and the report explains further how these relationships may affect both the peace process and prospects for future fighting. The following excerpts highlight key portions of the UN analysis:¹²²

The Taliban leaders have steered the movement through negotiations with the United States to conclude an agreement. The process has increased their political leverage and access to some Member States and international media, while they were simultaneously carrying out increased levels of attacks. Throughout, the Taliban have managed to stay unified, despite internal divergences of view.

Some Monitoring Team interlocutors maintain that the great majority of Taliban will follow orders from their leadership relating to the recently signed agreement with the United States, whatever those orders or directives may be. The Taliban leadership proved capable of maintaining the discipline of their fighters during the reduction in violence period and is likely to maintain the same discipline during any ramping-up of fighting in 2020, while seeking to gain political leverage.

The Taliban reshuffled their shadow government structure over the winter in preparation for the 2020 fighting season. Taliban members gathered in February to discuss the reorganization of the shadow governance and military structure in the eastern region. Key new appointments were made in the provinces of Khost, Kunar, Laghman, Logar, Wardak, Nangarhar, Nuristan and Paktiya, as well as for other provincial appointments in Badakhshan, Baghlan, Balkh, Bamyan, Kabul, Kapisa, Kunduz, Samangan and Takhar Provinces. Abdul Aziz Abbasin, a senior member of the Haqqani Network and brother of Taliban deputy, Sirajuddin Haqqani, ordered increased supplies of ammunition and explosive materials for Taliban forces in Ghazni, Wardak, Paktiya and Parwan Provinces.

... According to Member States, continued internal disagreements within the Taliban leadership grew more pronounced as a result of ongoing talks with the United States. However, the Taliban leadership has been able to maintain the unity and discipline of its rank and file. Several Taliban factions emerged in the aftermath of the announcement of the death of Mullah Mohammad Omar Ghulam Nabi, as previously reported by the Monitoring Team. Despite the public appearance of greater Taliban unity more recently, existing fault lines have deepened as a consequence of the negotiations with the United States and aspects of the agreement.

There are also reported divisions within the Taliban's Political Office, including among the delegation team between those aligned with Abdul Ghani Baradar Abdul Ahmad Turk and a more hardline group close to Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai. Those at the Political Office in Doha understood the need for the Taliban to interact with the international community and show moderation, while rank-and-file fighters were reported not to share that view. Consequently, interlocutors believed that the Taliban leadership had not fully disclosed the details of the agreement, particularly any commitment to cut ties with Al-Qaida and foreign terrorist fighters, for fear of a backlash – a matter that had surfaced repeatedly as a topic of acrimonious internal debate.

Al-Qaida has been operating covertly in Afghanistan while still maintaining close relations with the Taliban. Should conditions of the agreement with the United States become binding for the Taliban, it may prompt a split between pro- and anti-Al-Qaida camps. The Monitoring Team learned that at least one group of senior Taliban had already formed a new group in opposition to any possible peace agreement, purportedly known as Hizb-i Vilayat Islami¹¹ and composed mainly of dissident senior Taliban members residing outside Afghanistan. Other interlocutors believed that the successful implementation of the agreement could lead foreign terrorist fighters to give up fighting or relocate outside Afghanistan. Alternatively, should the peace process fail, there could be a surge in violence and chaos in Afghanistan.

... Divisions within the Taliban's Political and Military Commissions after the death of Mullah Mohammad Omar also reflect older rivalries, for example, between the Alizai and Nurzai tribes. Long-standing Alizai military commanders in the field, Sadr Ibrahim and Mullah Abdul Qayyum Zakir, lead a faction Ibrahim and Zakir adopt a hard line, along with senior members of the Haqqani Network, who favour continued fighting. This group is set against a larger faction of Nurzai Taliban loyal to Haibatullah Akhundzada.

... Interlocutors of the Monitoring Team, including reconciled Taliban, have reported that resentment exists among Taliban fighters towards the senior leadership who are considered to be out of touch with battlefield hardships. There is discontent with senior Taliban living comfortably abroad with their families. Some

interlocutors assessed that a peace brokered by representatives from the Taliban's Political Office, who were considered aloof to the rest of the movement and thought to be "on salaries of \$10,000 monthly", might prove fragile; and that the dialogue would have been better approached by influential Taliban commanders on the ground, such as Ibrahim.

Interlocutors reported that some Taliban fighters had left the group after hearing accounts of the comfortable lifestyle of Taliban leaders living abroad. The reports were supposedly relayed by a local Taliban commander in Helmand Province, Mullah Abdul Bari, who had spent time with Mawlawi Sardar, the brother of prominent Quetta Shura member Mullah Amir Khan Motaqi. One source stated that, upon his return to Helmand, Mullah Bari had raised "the issue of the dire conditions in which Taliban fighters were residing compared with members of the Quetta Shura." The Taliban later claimed that Bari had maintained ties with the Government of Afghanistan, and he was summarily killed.

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What is less clear is how much of the Taliban's awkward blend of ultraconservative Afghan practices, Deobandi Islam, and Sharia law they would try to bring to a joint government or actual peace. One problem with violent extremism is that it leads observers to focus on the movement's violence and not what it says about governance and social values. When the Taliban actually controlled most of Afghanistan, it was a government that was willing to profit from narcotics except in its last year of office, but willing to reject many of the conditions shaping modern society and economics.

It took an ultraconservative approach to Islam banking and investment. It forbade eating pork and the use of alcohol. It opposed the use of the Internet, music, movies, and television and most forms of art, paintings and photography. Women were not allowed to work, and girls over ten years of age were forbidden to attend schools or universities. Prayer was made compulsory and no debate of Taliban beliefs or practices was permitted. Thieves were punished by amputating their hands or feet. The end result would make it almost impossible for Afghanistan to compete for foreign investment, obtain foreign aid, and function in the International community.

Continuing Taliban Links to al Qaeda and the Haqqani Network

There are divisions among experts as to the extent of Taliban ties to al Qaeda and ties to the Haqqani networks, as well as to the threats such ties pose. The UN report provides considerable detail on these links, and it casts further doubt on how serious any split between the Taliban and al Qaeda will be:¹²³

The Monitoring Team has frequently highlighted the link between Al-Qaida and the Taliban in its reports, links that it assesses have remained strong since the removal of the Taliban regime 18 years ago and which have been continually reinforced by pledges of allegiance from Al-Qaida to the Taliban Amir al Mu'minin, or "leader of the faithful". Information provided to the Monitoring Team since its previous report has indicated that Al-Qaida is quietly gaining strength in Afghanistan while continuing to operate with the Taliban under their protection.

Member States report that Al-Qaida and the Taliban held meetings over the course of 2019 and in early 2020 to discuss cooperation related to planning, training and the provision by the Taliban of safe havens for Al-Qaida members inside Afghanistan. Al-Qaida is covertly active in 12 Afghan provinces: Badakhshan, Ghazni, Helmand, Khost, Kunar, Kunduz, Logar, Nangarhar, Nimruz, Nuristan, Paktiya and Zabul. While it is difficult to be certain of the exact number of Al-Qaida fighters in Afghanistan, the Monitoring Team's estimate is between 400 and 600 armed operatives.

... According to interlocutors, al-Zawahiri met with members of the Haqqani Network in February 2020. Hafiz Azizuddin Haqqani and Yahya Haqqani consulted al-Zawahiri over the agreement with the United States and the peace process. Yahya Haqqani has been the primary Haqqani Network focal point for liaison with Al-Qaida since mid-2009.

The presence in Afghanistan of Al-Qaida, particularly in the form of Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent, was demonstrated most clearly on 22 September when a joint United States-Afghan operation targeted a suspected Taliban and Al-Qaida gathering in the Shabaroz area of Musa Qal'ah District, Helmand Province. It was later confirmed that the leader of Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent, Asim Umar, had been killed in the attack, along with several foreign nationals, including the group's deputy, its "courier" to al-Zawahiri and several foreign female members. Umar and his followers were being sheltered by local Taliban forces, some of whom had also been killed in the raid. Earlier, in June, an Al-Qaida in the Indian Ocean...

.. Additional information 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-Qaida. The newly established unit would be split into two operational zones with Hafiz Azizuddin Haqqani in overall command and leading forces in the Loya Paktiya area (Khost, Logar, Paktika and Paktiya), while the remaining force would be deployed to Kunar and Nuristan under Shir Khan Manga, the head of intelligence for the Haqqani Network. Separate information provided by another Member State had indicated that Al-Qaida was establishing new training camps in the east of the country.

... Possibly prompted by the killing of Asim Umar, the Taliban head of intelligence, Mawlawi Hamidullah Akhundzada, has reportedly instructed Taliban fighters to facilitate the movement of Al-Qaida fighters under the command of Mufti Mahmood from the south to the eastern region of Afghanistan.

Some Member States reported that the Taliban appear to have strengthened their relationship with Al-Qaida rather than the opposite. One Member State reported that the regularity of meetings between Al-Qaida seniors and the Taliban "made any notion of a break between the two mere fiction". The link was described not in simple terms of group-to-group, but rather as "one of deep personal ties (including through marriage) and long-term sense of brotherhood". Al-Qaida capitalizes on this through its network of mentors and advisers who are embedded with the Taliban, providing advice, guidance and financial support. The Taliban offensive against Ghazni City in August 2018 was a prime example of the effective deployment of Al-Qaida support.

The UN report notes that Secretary Pompeo stated after the February 29th agreement that a U.S. withdrawal of military forces would be conditions-based that "the Taliban must respect the agreement, specifically regarding their promises of severing ties with terrorists," and that the United States was "not required to leave unless they can demonstrate they are fulfilling every element of their end of the bargain." So far, U.S. willingness to act on conditions-based agreements has not proved reassuring even when the U.S. is dealing with issues like the Afghan central government's misuse of aid.

How Real is the Taliban's Search for Peace?

The Taliban also will have to decide whether it supports a full peace or not, and how much of its ideology it will insist on preserving. So far, the Taliban seems to speak with one voice from its leadership and another from its negotiators. The Taliban's formal leadership has made it clear that the Taliban remains committed to its ideology. An article by Bill Roggio in the *Long War Journal* notes that the Taliban's Emir – Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada – released an Eid-ul-Fitr statement on May 20, 2020 that scarcely implied a change in Taliban goals.¹²⁴

The objectives of our Jihad are to gain the pleasure of Allah (SwT), freedom of our country and to establish an Islamic system. The sacrifices, hardships and tribulations endured by the people and Mujahideen in this great cause (Jihad) are not hidden from anyone ... We are offering general amnesty to all those standing in the opposition ranks if they choose to renounce their enmity. We urge everyone to take full advantage of this amnesty by ending their opposition and not becoming an impediment for the establishment of an Islamic government which is the aspiration of millions of martyred, wounded, disabled, orphaned, widowed and suffering Afghans...

Haibatullah did strike a note of compromise: ¹²⁵

... [T]he Islamic Emirate once again assures everyone that it does not have a monopolist policy, every male and female member of society shall be given their due rights, none shall feel any sense of deprivation or injustice and all work necessary for the welfare, durability and development of society will be addressed in the light of divine Shariah law...

However, the Taliban's official position is still that it "has not readily embraced this death and destruction for the sake of some silly ministerial posts or a share of the power." Roggio notes that a week after the February 29 agreements, the Taliban issued a Fatwa that still called for an Islamic government headed by Emir Haibatullah, who is described as Afghanistan's "lawful ruler" and the Fatwa stated the Taliban "shall continue waging armed jihad" until this goal was achieved.¹²⁶

As this 19-year jihad against the foreign occupation was waged under the command of a legal emir, the termination of occupation agreement does not mean that his [Haibatullah's] rule is absolved. The mujahideen must work to establish an Islamic government ruled by an emir. That obligation is the next step after U.S. and its allies' troops leave. Until the occupation is completely severed from its roots and an Islamic government formed, the mujahideen [Taliban] shall continue waging armed jihad and exerting

Given all these uncertainties, it is not clear how the Taliban will react. The peace process might create a Taliban that is so divided against itself that it could actually weaken itself even compared to the already divided and weak central government – a number of rebel movements have done so even at moments of success in the post war era. However, it is not clear how a strong enough Afghan central government coalition can emerge that could then define and negotiate an even more effective peace agreement, much less implement one.

A splinter group of the Taliban with links to Iran has already emerged by the name of Hezb-e Walayat-e Islami, or Party of Islamic Guardianship.¹²⁷ It is reported that the group formed after the Taliban signed the February 2020 peace deal with the United States. The current status of the group is unknown, but its members do include one senior member of the Taliban and other radical commanders and members of smaller Taliban offshoots.

It also is all too possible that it will be far easier for the Taliban to play a spoiler role, to weaken and divide the Afghan government effort, and/or to exploit the implementation of a peace agreement; than it will be for the central government to agree on a peace and then cooperate to make it work. Nothing about Afghan leadership from the mid-1970s to the present is particularly reassuring.

How Will the Central Government Deal with the Peace Process?

This leaves the question open as to how well a weak and divided central government can negotiate with – or govern jointly with – the Taliban. When the U.S. negotiated with the Taliban, Afghan representatives were not formally involved in the U.S.-Taliban negotiations and there was no agreement that the Taliban would not attack Afghan security forces or officials of the Afghan central government. However, the uptick in violence cited earlier does violate the agreement that the Taliban would reduce violence by 80%.

The Afghan central government is still under pressure from the U.S. to pursue the peace negotiations, but the Taliban still does not recognize its legitimacy – and the central government's reluctance to move forward is becoming apparent.

The head of the High Council for National Reconciliation, Abdullah Abdullah, recently stated that, "The continuing level of violence, which is not justified at all, it makes the people worried and extremely concerned. That makes the political environment extremely difficult. I hope everybody gets that message."¹²⁸ He also told the *U.S. Institute for Peace* that the high levels of violence do not create "a good environment for the start of negotiations."

The central government must also face the challenge of what any future government that is acceptable to the Taliban will mean to both the Afghan people and the various power brokers and figures in the central government. According to Khalid Noor, a member of the negotiating team, "If we compromise the rights of our people," he said, an oppressive government could harm Afghanistan for generations to come."¹²⁹ The central government and many Afghans may well want an end to the violence, but it is doubtful that they are willing to achieve peace at the cost of their survival.

Failed Governance as well as Failed Politics

Afghan politics are only part of the Afghan central government's problems in forging and then implementing a peace. A successful peace requires a successful government at every level of governance that can find and *actually implement* working compromises between the existing central government and the Taliban. It also requires a government that can win the loyalty and support of the Afghan people.

As is the case with Afghan politics, public opinion regarding Afghan governance is more positive than might be expected – although once again such opinion is mixed. The positive aspects of such poll results again may reflect the fact most living Afghans have known nothing better and that people were polled at a time when they had more positive hopes for peace and effective leadership. The poll was taken before the Presidential election's failure became fully apparent, and the details of the February peace agreements became known: 130

Satisfaction with the performance of different levels of the Afghan government has increased continuously over the last five years. Around two-thirds of Afghans in 2019 (65.7%) believe that the National Unity Government (NUG) is doing a good job (20.1% very good, 45.6% somewhat good), a 6-point increase from 2018 (59.6%) and a 9.5-point increase from 2017 (56.2%). Satisfaction with the performance of provincial governments (64.5%) is also higher than 2018 (61.3%).

On a related matter, the Survey asks Afghans how successful they think the government has been in improving the living conditions of people in their area. More than half of respondents, 69.3%, say a little or a lot, the highest level of confidence reported so far.

The relationship between confidence in one's member of parliament and satisfaction with provincial government and the relationship between level of fear and satisfaction with provincial government remain consistent in 2019. Respondents who express "some" or "a lot" of confidence in their MPs are more likely to say the provincial government is doing a good job (76.3%) than those who report "not much" or "no confidence at all" (51.3%). And conversely, respondents who fear for their safety are less likely to express satisfaction with provincial government.

Overall, confidence in governmental and nongovernmental organizations has increased, with the exception of the Independent Election Commission, which has seen confidence drop from 43.3% in 2018 to 42.3% in 2019. As in previous years, Afghans have the most confidence in religious leaders (71.2%). Compared to 2018, confidence in MPs has gone up by 10.2 percentage points, from 42.3% in 2018 to 52.6% in 2019, the highest level so far. Confidence in the following organizations has improved since last year: government ministers (up 6.1 percentage points, to 44.4%), national NGOs (up 4.0 percentage points, to 53.3%), provincial councils (up 4.7 percentage points, to 55.6%) and international NGOs (up 4.9 percentage points, to 47.3%)

Unfortunately, these results are more favorable than the real level of Afghan governance justifies.

A Warning from SIGAR

The Afghan central government must pursue its peace efforts with one of the worst levels of governance in the world. Few Americans have as much experience in dealing with the Afghan government as John Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), and he has raised the problems in Afghan governance many times in his testimony to Congress. In March 2020, he summed up the problems in Afghan governance in a lecture at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.¹³¹

"the 600-pound gorilla in the room is of course, the peace agreement that was signed during my latest trip to Kabul on February 29th and the potential withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan within the next 14 months."¹³²

... Afghanistan is one of the most corrupt and insecure countries in the world. Afghan security force and civilian casualties are at or near all-time highs, and to date, over 2,300 service members have lost their lives.

In addition to the Taliban threat, there may be as many as 20 terrorist groups operating in the Afghanistan/Pakistan region, the most notable of which is the so-called Islamic State.

Because of the widespread security threats, for the past several years all U.S. civilian personnel arriving in Afghanistan have been required to fly via government helicopter between the international airport and the U.S. Embassy – a distance of just three kilometers, because that stretch of road has been deemed too dangerous for routine vehicle travel.

And as if the daily threat of violent attack isn't enough to deal with, SIGAR and other agencies also face the challenge of working in one of the most corrupt countries on the planet. Afghanistan ranks 173rd out of 180 countries on Transparency International's most recent Corruption Perception Index, and 91 percent of Afghans surveyed state that corruption is a problem in their daily lives.

Reconstruction is a large, lengthy, and difficult undertaking for any country. But the pervasive insecurity and corruption plaguing Afghanistan have severely inhibited U.S. reconstruction efforts, and have made oversight of these efforts incredibly difficult...

Sopko summed up the lessons that SIGAR had learned from years of inspecting the quality of Afghan governance as follows:

- Our first lessons learned report, *Corruption in Conflict*, published in 2016, found that corruption substantially undermined the U.S. mission in Afghanistan from the very beginning. The lesson is that anticorruption efforts need to be at the center of planning and policymaking for contingencies like Afghanistan.
- Our second report, published in 2017, entitled *Reconstructing the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces*, revealed that the U.S. government was ill-prepared to help build an Afghan army and police force capable of protecting Afghanistan from internal or external threats. We found that the U.S. government lacked a comprehensive approach and coordinating body to successfully implement the whole-of-government programs necessary to develop capable and self-sustaining Afghan security forces.
- In April 2018, we published our third report, *Private Sector Development and Economic Growth*, which found that early economic successes in Afghanistan were undermined by ongoing physical insecurity and political instability, which discouraged investment and other economic activity.
- Our fourth report, *Stabilization*, was published in May 2018 and revealed that we greatly overestimated our ability to build and reform government institutions in Afghanistan, and that reconstruction programs were not tailored to Afghanistan's operating environment, were hampered by unrealistic timelines, and successes rarely lasted longer than the physical presence of coalition troops.
- *Counternarcotics* was the subject of our fifth report, published in June 2018. We found that no program led to lasting reductions in poppy cultivation or opium production—and, without a willing Afghan partner and stable security environment, there was little possibility of future success.
- In 2019, our sixth report, *Divided Responsibility*, highlighted the difficulty of coordinating security sector assistance during active combat and under the umbrella of a 39-member NATO coalition when no specific DOD organization or military service was assigned ultimate responsibility for U.S. efforts.
- And last Fall, our seventh report, *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants*, examined the five main post-2001 efforts to reintegrate former combatants into Afghan society. We found that successful reintegration was a key to peace but that our prior efforts did not help any significant number of former fighters to reintegrate, did not weaken the insurgency, and did not reduce violence.

Good or Bad: Afghan Governance Is – and Will Continue to Be – Dependent on Outside Financing

The quality of governance is also only part of the story. Financing is an equally critical issue. The Afghan central government cannot function in any area without massive outside aid. The World

Bank estimates that international grants finance 75% of *Afghanistan's public expenditures*. The United States is the largest source of those grants.”¹³³ The Afghan central government's total civil and security budget now totals around \$11 billion annually while Afghan domestic revenues are only about \$2.5 billion.¹³⁴ The World Bank also notes that this dependence reflects,¹³⁵

“the wide gap between revenues and expenditures...Total grants are equal to around US\$8.5 billion per year. This is equal to around 45 percent of GDP, compared to an average of around 10 percent for low income countries.”

There is no reliable way to estimate Afghanistan's future needs if the central government and the Taliban can agree on a peace. The World Bank has done a preliminary study, however, that warns that any peacetime Afghan government is likely to be at least as dependent on outside aid as it is now, and it would need more additional aid for real development. Any warfighting savings in security would be offset by the need to absorb and fund Taliban fighters while also keeping ANDSF personnel employed long enough to make a transition into the civil economy.

Chart Thirteen shows the key bottom lines in these World Bank estimates. The World Bank study also makes key points that will apply to any real peace, regardless of its specific terms:¹³⁶

- Public expenditure in Afghanistan is already at high and unsustainable levels. Total public expenditure is equal to around 58 percent of GDP, much higher than average for a low-income country. Revenues have grown rapidly over recent years, but still fall far short of what would be required to support expenditure at current levels. Total revenues are currently equal to only around US \$2.5 billion dollars per year, while total expenditures are equal to around US\$11 billion per year.
- Total financing needs are likely to remain at close to current levels. Aggregate future financing needs are driven by expenditures on: i) security; ii) core government services and infrastructure; iii) new public investments required to support accelerated economic growth; and iv) post-settlement programming initiatives to consolidate and sustain a political settlement, such as community development and job creation schemes. Aggregate financing needs are expected to remain close to current levels. Declines in security sector expenditure will be offset by the need for increased civilian spending to support a rapidly-growing population and facilitate faster economic growth.
- Under a baseline scenario of continued slow economic growth and moderate improvement in revenues, grant needs would range between US\$5.8 billion and US\$7.6 billion per year. US\$5.8 billion per year would be sufficient to finance maintenance of existing services and gradual expansion of infrastructure in line with population growth. US\$7 billion per year would be sufficient to finance current services and infrastructure with additional investments to support more-rapid growth (including human capital and infrastructure improvements). US\$7.6 billion per year would be sufficient to meet current infrastructure and service costs, finance growth-enhancing investments, and provide resources for additional programs to sustain and consolidate peace, including through expanded community development and job creation programs.
- A precipitous decline in grant resources, however, would force very difficult trade-offs between important policy objectives. A precipitous reduction in either security or civilian grants would force a choice between: i) sustaining security spending; ii) maintaining the delivery of basic government functions (such as social services and infrastructure); iii) undertaking required public investments to support faster economic growth and poverty reduction; and iv) delivering short-term benefits to Afghans following a political settlement to help to sustain and consolidate peace.
- Benefits of short-term post settlement programming are likely to be short-lived if they come at the cost of continued investment in the basic functions of government and the core service delivery mechanisms that have been built up since 2001.
- Expectations should be realistic regarding the capacity of new grant-financed programs to deliver a substantial peace dividend. Resources available for delivering a post settlement dividend are likely to remain limited under any scenario, relative to the extent of grant support already being provided. The most significant benefits of a political settlement are likely to be realized if such a settlement leads to improvements in

security, political stability, and freedom of movement. Increased private sector investment, job creation, and access to services resulting from such improvements is likely to deliver much more significant and sustainable benefits than grant-financed interventions. This is especially the case given the current context of already-unsustainably high public expenditure and likely declines in grant support over the medium-term.

- Under a baseline (pre-Corona) scenario, revenue growth would be minimal. Under a baseline scenario, conflict continues at current levels. Limited progress is made with policy and institutional reforms. No major new revenue-generating projects are realized. Economic growth accelerates only slightly to around three percent per annum over the period. Under this scenario, revenues increased only slightly from around US\$2.5 billion in 2019 to around US\$2.8 billion by 2024.
- A downside (Corona-like) scenario could see revenues collapsing. Under a downside scenario, conflict intensifies, and governance and institutions are weakened. No progress is made with policy and institutional reforms. No major new revenue-generating projects are realized. Economic growth remains stagnant at around 1.5 percent per annum. Revenue performance weakens to a similar extent observed over the 2014 election period (revenue as a percentage of GDP collapses to around 8.5 percent in 2020 before recovering gradually to current levels by the end of the period). Under this scenario, revenues fall quickly from around US\$2.5 billion in 2019 to just US\$1.7 billion in 2020, before recovering to around current levels by 2024.
- Economic growth in Afghanistan is currently too slow to reduce poverty and increase living standards. The economy is currently growing by around two percent per year, while the population is growing at around 2.3 percent per year. This equates to declining per capita incomes. Poverty rates are rapidly increasing, with the number of Afghans living below the basic needs poverty line (of around US\$1 per day) increasing from around 39 percent in 2012 to around 55 percent today. The number of jobs available to Afghans is currently declining, while 300,000 young people enter the labor force every year. While a reduction in violence may facilitate improvements in growth, employment, and living standards, substantial public investments to improve services and expand infrastructure are likely to be needed to mobilize new growth sources that could drive a step-change in economic growth.

Various Afghan reform plans have now repeatedly called for increases in Afghan domestic revenues and failed to produce them at the promised level. The recent trends in government-raised revenues have been far from good, and near-term revenues are likely to be hit hard by the Coronavirus crisis as well as by related cuts in donor funding. The SIGAR *Quarterly Report for April 30, 2020* notes that,¹³⁷

Afghanistan's sustainable domestic revenues contracted by 7.8% over the first three months of FY 1399 (December 22, 2019, to December 21, 2020), year-on-year, SIGAR analysis showed. Because no one-off revenues were recorded in the first quarter, aggregate domestic revenues declined by the same amount. In the first three months of FY 1399, the Afghan government collected \$494.4 million (compared to \$536.2 million in the first three months of FY 1398) ... In recent years, aggregate annual revenues have been approximately \$2.5 billion.

It was not possible to ascertain what drove the decline in the first quarter (nearly half of revenues collected had not yet been reconciled). However, a spokesman for the Ministry of Finance (MOF) attributed the contraction to "political issues" (a presumed reference to the disputed presidential election) and lower customs taxes...Because the Afghan government relies so heavily on customs duties and taxes—which make up approximately one-fifth of all revenues—increased border closures due to the spread of COVID-19 could adversely affect Afghanistan's fiscal position in 2020.

The Afghan government signaled it would continue the recent trend of supplementing lagging core revenue collections (i.e. taxes) with large one-off transfers of foreign exchange profits from the central bank (DAB)... In the fourth month of FY 1399, the MOF received a \$163.6 million transfer from DAB, constituting 68.0% of revenues collected in the month, as of April 12, 2020...While central bank profits are not an illegitimate source of revenue, they are not considered to be a sustainable source of government funding...

The LIG *Quarterly Report for January 1-March 31, 2020* adds the following details,¹³⁸

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Afghanistan, experts were expressing concern about Afghanistan's economic health. Afghan government revenue is both an important fiscal indicator and critical to stability in

a post-conflict environment, according to a report published by the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) in August 2019. To counter the expected sharp decline in external assistance, the Afghan government will need an increase in revenue to supplement foreign assistance, fund its defense, deliver services to its citizens, and transition toward self-reliance. The World Bank noted that without revenue growth, an increase in the percentage of security spending funded by the Afghan government would come at the cost of other services. DoS and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) staff have expressed concern that the Afghan government has limited opportunities to compensate for reductions in donor assistance.

USAID projects that anticipated appropriations for USAID non-humanitarian assistance funding in Afghanistan will fall 46 percent from FY 2018 to FY 2021, from \$500 million to \$270 million. Meanwhile, funding remaining from prior appropriations decreased from \$2.6 billion in October 2019 to \$2 billion in March 2020.

International grants finance 75 percent of public expenditures and nearly 90 percent of security expenditures in Afghanistan, according to the World Bank. The Afghan government experienced a decline in international grants equivalent to more than 1 percent of GDP in 2019, and the World Bank expects this trend to continue as grants decline from an estimated \$8.2 billion in 2020 to \$6.9 billion in 2024...

The Afghan government's ability to offset reductions in foreign assistance is in question, and several indicators point to slowing growth in revenues. Although the World Bank reported that Afghan revenues increased to a new high of 14.1 percent of GDP in 2019 from 13.2 percent in 2018, much of this increase reflected large, one-off non-tax revenues, such as central bank operating profits and currency depreciation that would not be sustainable over the long-term. Overall, the rate of revenue growth has slowed from a 22 percent increase in 2015 to a 12 percent increase in 2018, according to a report published by the USIP...Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in Afghanistan, the World Bank projected that domestic revenue growth would be flat in 2020. The pandemic will likely impose further strain on the Afghan economy.

To increase revenue, the Afghan government has relied on high levels of non-tax revenue that it may not be able to count on as a future source of growth. The growth in Afghan government revenue from 2015 to 2019 was largely driven by non-tax revenues, according to the World Bank.²⁷⁷ In 2019, non-tax revenues increased by more than 31 percent from the year before to 88.5 billion Afghani (approximately \$1.1 billion) and accounted for 42.4 percent of all revenue...Non-tax revenues in Afghanistan, between 4 and 6 percent of GDP, are high compared to other fragility-, conflict-, and violence-affected developing countries that collect an average of 3.5 percent of GDP in non-tax revenues...This reliance on non-tax revenues can be less sustainable compared to tax revenues and may be sensitive to political interference, according to the World Bank...

While the average annual growth of tax revenue was 12.5 percent between 2015 and 2018, revenue from taxes in 2019 remained approximately the same as in 2018. According to the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, the Afghan government is placing an onerous tax burden on the private sector with a 70 percent tax rate.²⁸² For example, taxes have limited the telecommunications sector's resources to invest in expansion, increase profitability, or upgrade equipment, according to the embassy....In addition, the government collects an advance tax on business receipts, meaning that it has already collected taxes for 2020.

...In an effort to increase domestic revenue mobilization and meet its commitments under a World Trade Organization agreement, Afghanistan is scheduled to begin implementing a value-added tax in January 2021...According to a report published by the USIP, the institution of a value added tax may contribute to broadening the tax base... The World Bank estimates that this will produce additional revenue (an estimated 0.8 percent of GDP) in 2021, increasing over time to 1.8 percent in 2023. However, even if fully realized, this would only partially offset the expected reduction in international grants.

...According to a report published by the USIP, economic expansion will be necessary to broaden the narrow tax base and generate sustainable revenue growth. Policy and administrative reforms will only produce limited improvements in tax revenues, according to the World Bank. However, decades of violence, high rates of civilian casualties, and political instability all present significant challenges to private sector investment in Afghanistan.

Chart Thirteen: Peace is Dependent on Massive Outside Aid to Governance and Government Activity

Figure: Total financing needs remain roughly constant over the projection period
Total projected financing needs

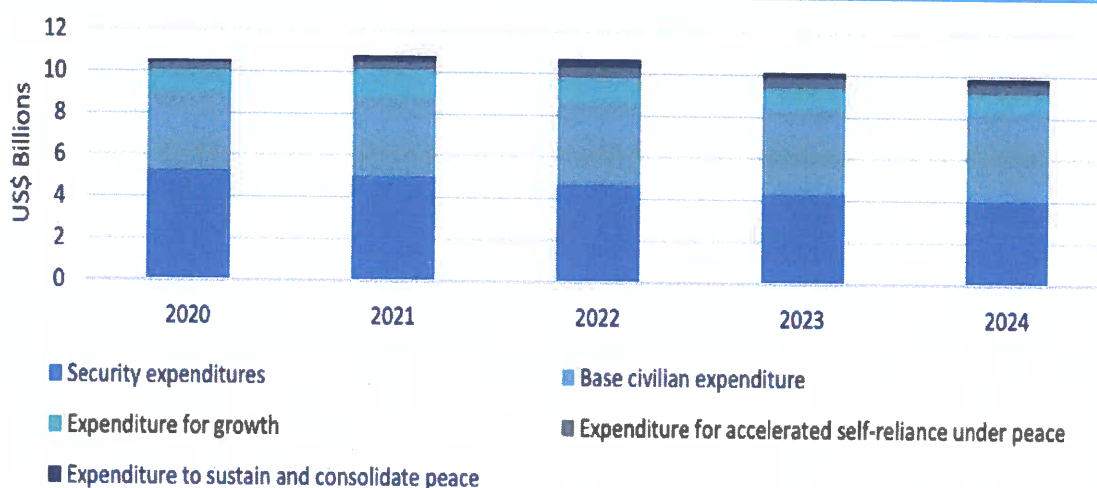


Table: Grant needs remain substantial under all likely scenarios
Annual grant needs by scenario and expenditure category

	Growth and revenue scenario			
	Downside	Baseline	Mid-case	Rapid growth
Average annual grant needs 2020-2024 (US\$ billions)				
Base expenditures (security and civilian)	6.4	5.8	5.3	4.6
Base expenditures + Expenditures for accelerated growth	7.5	7.0	6.4	5.6
Base expenditures + Expenditures for accelerated growth + Expenditures to consolidate and sustain peace	8.2	7.6	7.0	6.3

World Bank, Financing Peace, Fiscal Challenges and Implications for a Post Settlement Afghanistan, December 12, 2019, pp i-ii, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/05/world/asia/afghanistan-aid-world-bank.html>.

Development Plans and Aid That Produce Far Too Little Development

Afghan development plans have had limited impact and so have major aid programs. In retrospect, the efforts to promote a “New Silk Road,” an Afghan ring road, and mining as the solutions to all of Afghanistan’s financial problems have been little more than a sick joke – although the fault lies with Western analysts rather than the Afghan government.

Moreover, far too much current development aid continues to be wasted on the central government. The LIG *Quarterly Report* states that,¹³⁹

USAID reported that due to a lack of political will and willing partners within the Afghan government, it has refocused programming to support collaboration between private industries and the associated government ministries that have the greatest potential for economic growth. While USAID has no current programs that directly support revenue generation, it reported that its activities focus on enabling private sector growth.

USAID reported that programs aimed at increasing revenue growth focus primarily on the mineral, civil aviation, health, and energy sectors, aiming to add value to the supply chains and increase exports. In these sectors, USAID staff noted the following opportunities to increase revenue:

- **Minerals:** USAID stated that the collection of government revenue from the mineral sector was less than \$10 million last year...USAID reported that this sector could produce substantially more revenue if the Afghan government implemented reforms to attract foreign investment, such as revising the 2018 Mining Law to simplify the process for obtaining the right to develop minerals... USAID currently supports these efforts through its 5-year, \$20 million Multi-Dimensional Economic Legal Reform Assistance Program by providing policy assistance to the Afghan government. USAID reported that it had provided legal and policy advice on the new mineral law, mining regulations, and a draft model contract, which USAID expects to facilitate private sector investment in the extractives sector.
- **Civil Aviation:** The Afghan government receives an estimated \$820 per plane for overflight rights from foreign airlines, according to USAID, and the revenue stream from Kabul Airport alone could produce as much as \$150 million per year.
- **Health:** The Afghan government collects between \$2 million and \$4 million per year in non-emergency hospital fees... USAID reported that it is working with the Afghan government on applying these funds into the health sector.
- **Energy:** USAID identified connecting more users to the main national electrical grid as a key component of increasing private sector economic growth. The cost of electricity for Afghan businesses is significantly lower when they are connected to the grid compared to when they must use diesel-generated electricity. USAID reported that it is working with the Afghan national electrical company, Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat, to expand access to the electrical grid...However, USAID also noted that a major challenge for Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat is the high level of debt it has incurred from government ministries not paying for their electricity

Peace may reduce war costs, but the financing of the Taliban and other power brokers will have to be addressed if there is to be a real and lasting peace. The Taliban now relies on donations, extortion, and narcotics. If it joins the government – or has any form of separate regional control – it will now need government financing. The willingness of local, regional, and factional power brokers – and narcotraffickers generally – to accept a peace plan that denies them their current income will also be problematic.

Corruption is a Key Challenge

Poll after poll of Afghanistan and other similar developing countries shows that corruption is one of the most critical single factors that undermines the quality of governance, and the same polls that have moderately favorable results regarding governance warns that few Afghans have any

faith in the level of corruption in the central government.¹⁴⁰ The Asia Foundation poll for 2019 found that,¹⁴¹

...81.5% of respondents in 2019 say corruption is a major problem in Afghanistan as a whole, identical with last year (81.5%). At the same time, 15.6% say corruption is a minor problem, and 2.5% say corruption is not a problem at all. Regionally, perceptions of corruption as a major problem in Afghanistan have risen in the South West (from 73.3% in 2018 to 83.0% in 2019) and the East (from 78.7% in 2018 to 84.5% in 2019) and declined in the South East (from 78.1% in 2018 to 68.8% in 2019) and the North West (from 82.0% in 2018 to 77.2% in 2019)... Some 67.9% of Afghans surveyed say corruption is a major problem in their daily life, 2.7 percentage points lower than the 70.6% in 2018. More than one-fifth of respondents, 23.1%, call this a minor problem, and 8.3% say it is not a problem at all.

Transparency International still ranks Afghanistan's government as the eighth most corrupt government in the world, and years of anti-corruption efforts have so far produced few – if any – effects. The SIGAR *Quarterly Report for April 30, 2020* not only highlights the same high level of corruption, it also makes it clear that that Afghan government is pursuing yet another series of anti-corruption measures that have had negligible or minimal impact at best.¹⁴²

The World Bank's broader assessments of Afghan corruption and all the other major aspects of Afghan governance are summed up all too clearly in its latest annual rankings of Afghan governance. These rankings are shown for the period from 1996 to 2018 in **Chart Fourteen**. These are not the worst rankings in the world, but they come very close in all six of the key aspects of governance the World Bank uses. They also show remarkably little improvement – if any – from 1996 to 2018.¹⁴³ If anything, the rise in corruption shown in Chart Fourteen means that the current government probably has worse corruption than many Afghans experienced under the Taliban.

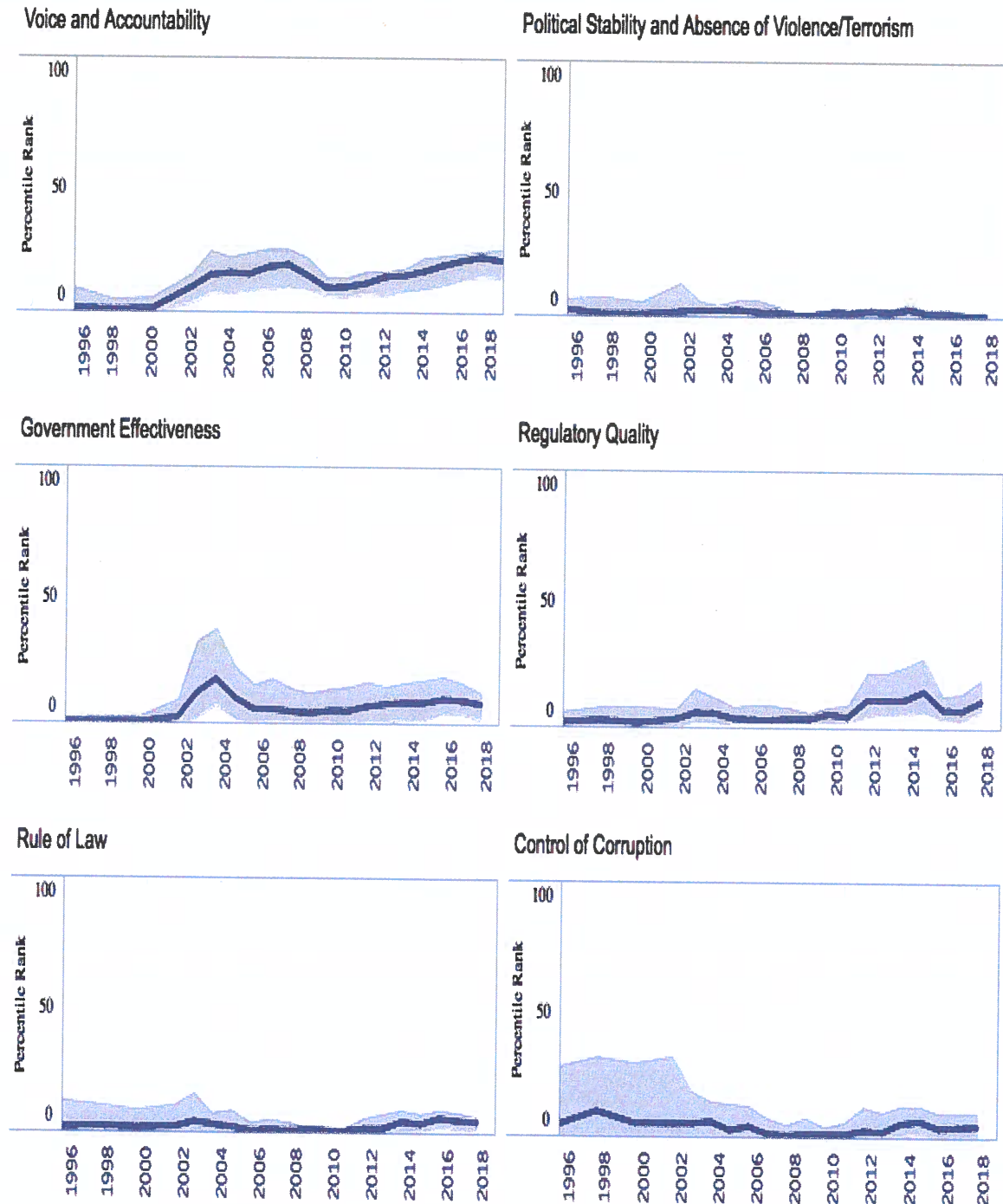
These problems affect virtually every civil and military activity of the Afghan central government, but corruption and the other problems in Afghan governance go far beyond the top levels of governance while also linking various government officials to drug trafficking. The shell of modern governance applies to Kabul, several other cities, and scattered parts of the country. Critical weaknesses exist in Afghan governance at the urban, provincial, and district levels.

They affect every aspect of the justice system, law enforcement, and internal security – as well as in most government jobs, contracting, major spending, infrastructure activity, and services. They shape the allocation and consumption of most outside aid as well as the many aspects of Afghanistan's operations as the world's dominant supplier of opium and natural opiates.

The real-world situation in Afghanistan is also generally far worse than many of the claims which have been made about Afghan progress following the defeat of the Taliban government would indicate. As SIGAR and a wide range of media reporting shows, the level of data quality or transparency in such reporting often exaggerates the actual progress in education, health, government services, and infrastructure. The same has been true of U.S. government reporting. Such favorable reporting often uses numbers that have no clear source, definition, and/or measures of uncertainty. They sometimes cover only a relatively small portion of the country and “islands of competence.”

Sources like the World Bank field teams have warned that the levels of progress in governance, such as those that occurred after 2001, have since seen steady cuts – triggered in part by the steady loss of areas where the government and aid workers can operate and collect data. These include key areas like fighting poverty and education.

Chart Fourteen: Afghanistan's Failed Levels of Governance at Every Level of World Bank Assessment: 1996-2018



World Bank, *Worldwide Governance Indicators*, <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Reports>.

Peace Expectations and Population Pressure

Afghans under the control of the central government have largely learned to live with these problems – in part because the standards of governance have been so low for such a long period of time and because the nation has been at war for decades. Afghans are far less likely to tolerate today's conditions, however, once the war ends. The same is almost certainly true of Taliban fighters and the Afghans that live under de facto Taliban control. Peacetime expectations are certain to be higher on all sides.

Moreover, the need for better governance is driven by a sharply rising population. As the World Bank, IMF, and UN have all noted, Afghanistan is also under intense population pressure. The estimates of the U.S. Census Bureau – whose rankings track closely with UN data – are shown in **Chart Fifteen**. In spite of decades of warfare, these estimates indicate that Afghanistan has gone from a population of only 8.15 million in 1950, to 15.054 million in 1980, to 22.46 million in 2000, to 29.12 million in 2010, and to 36.64 million in 2020 – 4.5 times the figure in 1950. The population is projected to increase by another 74% by 2050.

In spite of a near constant war, Afghanistan is still experiencing a major “youth bulge.” Its population reached 32.56 million in 2020, and it will increase by roughly a million a year to 45.67 million in 2030.¹⁴⁴ This means there will be a need to create well over 300,000 new male jobs a year in a country that will increasingly need to create jobs for women as well. While current estimates of Afghan youth unemployment differ radically, some are well over 17% and would be significantly higher if service in the military – due to the lack of any civil job opportunities – and disguised unemployment were considered.¹⁴⁵ It also means a steady increase in the already extraordinarily high dependency ratio of young Afghans that are dependent on income from other working Afghans.

Afghan expectations will be even further increased by Afghanistan's shift toward urbanization. Urban living standards are generally much higher, but so are the knowledge about the level of corruption and the benefits of a modern economy. The current high level of urbanization has already been driven in part by the search for security and in part by the search for better living conditions. The CIA estimates the level of urbanization reached 26% in 2020, and this was estimated to be increasing at 3.4% per year. This has steadily increased the number of Afghans dependent on a market economy, urban prices, and government services.¹⁴⁶

Chart Fifteen: Afghanistan's Population: 1950-2050**Demographic Overview - Custom Region - Afghanistan**

Demographic Indicators	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2040	2050
Population															
Midyear population (in thousands)	8,150	9,829	12,431	15,044	13,568	19,445	22,461	26,335	29,121	32,564	36,644	41,117	45,665	54,717	63,795
Growth rate (percent)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	-5.9	-1.9	3.5	-1.3	3.4	2.1	2.3	2.4	2.2	2.0	1.7	1.4
Fertility															
Total fertility rate (births per woman)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	6.9	8.0	8.0	8.0	6.4	5.9	5.3	4.8	4.3	3.9	3.2	2.8
Crude birth rate (per 1,000 population)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	47	54	53	51	42	40	39	37	34	30	26	22
Births (in thousands)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	709	739	1,035	1,153	1,093	1,158	1,256	1,344	1,383	1,386	1,396	1,422
Mortality															
Life expectancy at birth (years)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	39	42	44	45	47	49	51	53	55	57	61	65
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 births)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	191	168	157	147	137	126	115	104	94	84	65	49
Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 births)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	286	251	235	220	205	187	169	151	135	119	90	66
Crude death rate (per 1,000 population)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	24	23	21	19	17	15	14	13	11	10	9	8
Deaths (in thousands)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	366	305	408	434	436	439	452	465	472	474	486	515
Migration															
Net migration rate (per 1,000 population)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	-82	-51	3	-45	9	-3	-2	-0	-0	-0	-0	-0
Net number of migrants (in thousands)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	-1,235	-895	52	-1,017	248	-95	-49	-4	-4	-5	-5	-6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base (IDB), June 2011, [https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/idb/metadata.php?R=Less%20Developed%20Countries%20\(LDCs\)&C=Afghanistan](https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/idb/metadata.php?R=Less%20Developed%20Countries%20(LDCs)&C=Afghanistan).

Forging a New A Structure of Governance

All of these factors affect the ability to create a new structure of governance in a peace agreement that includes the Taliban but excludes other extremist and terrorist movements. All require national, regional, and local compromises between the Taliban, the central government, and key power brokers in the way governance is shaped and functions. This does not have to be completed by May 2021 to meet the 14-month deadline, but the process of change must then be acceptable to both sides in spite of their major differences in goals and values.

As the previous sections of this analysis have shown, these problems also involve broad areas of the country that are known to be under Taliban control or where the Taliban currently disputes control with the Afghan central government. There are no clear or easy lines of demarcation that lend themselves to a split between the central government and the Taliban's systems, and there often are government controlled urban areas near Taliban controlled rural areas. They sometimes include key areas of drug production, areas with the same sect and ethnicity, and areas where pro-government power brokers and Taliban factions have their own goals and power. Once again, the deadlines for the peace pose serious questions as to whether this is feasible.

Afghan National Defense and Security Forces that Are Not ready to Stand Alone – In War or Peace

Civil politics and governance are only half the story. The peace process and any successful peace must cope with the fact the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) have become more effective over time but are still far too weak to stand on their own. The Afghan National Army (ANA) is the core of the force, but is still top heavy with mediocre senior officers; has serious corruption problems and ties to factions and power brokers; and has been dependent on U.S. and allied air power, elite forces, and train and assist units to keep the Taliban from seizing heavily populated areas.

Here, it is striking that the Department of Defense 1225 report on *Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan* – issued in June 2020 – makes it clear that the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) are not ready to stand on their own after U.S. and allied withdrawal – an issue in ways that no U.S. official discussion of the peace process has yet addressed. The Afghan government, the NATO command, and the United States have all steadily classified more and more of the data on Afghan force strength, readiness, and combat capability – but the 1225 Report still makes the limits to the ANDSF all too clear: ¹⁴⁷

The ASSF and AAF remain the most capable forces in the ANDSF and continue to grow their combat capabilities with maintenance and sustainment challenges being their chief remaining shortfall. The ANDSF will continue to rely over the long term on contracted logistic support and on the United States for the vast majority of the funding needed to sustain their combat operations. RS advisors continue to work with the ANA and ANP to address ongoing challenges in ensuring personnel are paid in a timely manner; performing ground vehicle maintenance; procuring and distributing quality food to their forces; maintaining facilities; and managing supply. The MoD and MoI continue to make gradual improvements in implementing accountability systems such as the Afghan Personnel and Pay System (APPS), which accounts for and manages payroll for the ANDSF, and Core-IMS, the inventory-management system for ANDSF equipment and supplies.

On May 13, 2020, President Ghani ordered the ANDSF to shift from the defensive posture they were in since the RIV period in February to an offensive mode in response to continued Taliban attacks against the ANDSF.

The ANDSF has many diverse elements. The June DoD 1225 report summarizes them as follows, as well as their dependence on U.S. funding: ¹⁴⁸

The authorized ANDSF force structure that the international community is willing to fund remains 352,000 ANA and ANP personnel, including the Afghan Air Force and Afghan Special Security Forces.

... MoD oversees the ANA, the Afghan National Civil Order Force (ANCOF), the Afghan Border Force (ABF), the AAF, and the MoD's pillars within the ASSF: the ANASOC and the SMW. The MoI oversees the four ANP forces that include the Afghan Uniform Police (AUP), the Public Security Police (PSP), the Afghan Border Police (ABP), and the Afghan Anti-Crime Police (AACP) as well as the Afghan Local Police (ALP), and the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF).

As of March 29, 2020, APPS data validates that just over 295,000 ANDSF personnel are eligible for pay. Direct contributions of ASFF to the Afghan Ministry of Finance funds pay and incentives for 178,815 MoD personnel and 17,856 Afghan Local Police validated in APPS as eligible for pay, predicated on their completion of the payroll process... Within the MoI, 98,891 personnel are assigned to authorized billets in APPS and eligible for base pay utilizing funds from the United Nations Development Program-managed Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA) to which a number of donor nations contribute.

...Separately, the United States funds up to an authorized level of 30,000 Afghan Local Police; this funding will end on September 30, 2020.

As the 1225 Report, SIGAR reporting, and LIG reporting make clear that most of these forces have limited effectiveness in fighting the Taliban or defending against its operations. The main exceptions are the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan Air Force (AAF).

The Afghan National Army (ANA) has some effective elite units, but these are overcommitted and over trained, and many elements remain mediocre at best. It is not strong enough or well led and trained enough to face the Taliban without U.S. and allied aid, and it cannot possibly acquire such capabilities within the time period set for reaching a peace. It is unclear when, if ever, it can acquire such capabilities without a peace.

The Afghan Air Force (AAF) is making progress, but still has problems in operating its existing systems, and lack anything like the mix of air strike and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (IS&R) assets of U.S. air combat forces. No plans currently exist to give such capabilities to AAF, and if peace agreements result in an actual peace, then the U.S. will reduce and eliminate its air and IS&R capabilities in Afghanistan, along with the rest of its combat troops.

The Afghan National Police (ANP) is notably more corrupt than the Army, lacks the support of an effective judicial system and rule of law, and most of its units are not properly trained and equipped for the kind of paramilitary operations necessary to defend and “hold” against the Taliban. Nearly two decades of efforts to produce an effective form of Afghan local police have failed, and they are again being reorganized into a new force. The end result to date has been national and local police forces with far too many elements that are corrupt, that back local power brokers or even become local power brokers, and that are not effective against the Taliban.

This raises critical challenges in dealing with Taliban – both if the peace process succeeds and if the peace process fails. If the Taliban does reach a peace agreement and it is actually implemented, the question immediately arises as to what that agreement will say about the new structure of Afghan forces; the future of the central government, ANDSF forces, and the Taliban forces; how they will be funded; who will control them and how; and their interface with local security and legal forces. Key questions will arise about providing training and equipment for fighters leaving the security forces, and how the new government will be able to exercise control.

If the peace effort fails, the Afghan central government will remain dependent on the U.S. and its allies for military support indefinitely into the future. This is support which the U.S. has made clear that it would be willing to provide

As of yet, there has been no meaningful open source official discussion of such issues. Afghanistan, however, has long been a country where the real “voters” have the guns. Accordingly, unless the Taliban and troops supporting given power brokers are disarmed and lose the automatic weapons and other systems they now have, it is all too possible that “power will grow out of the barrel of a gun.”

Afghan Perceptions of the Security Forces

The data that follow show that it will be years – if ever – before the Afghan security forces can stand on their own against the Taliban if a peace effort fails, and that the transition to some form of security that can actually control the Taliban if a peace settlement is eventually reached will be challenging at best. Polling data also show that Afghans are not confident about their security at present, and they have mixed feeling about the police and their justice system. As has been noted earlier, the Asia Foundation public opinion survey for 2019 found that,¹⁴⁹

This year, 74.5% of respondents say that they always, often, or sometimes fear for their personal safety. This represents an increase of over 3 percentage points since 2018 (71.1%) and a new high for the Survey. Fear for personal safety has risen every year since 2012, when it stood at 48.2%. Looking beyond the recent year-on-year increases, the 2019 figure represents an almost 100% increase from the first time the question was asked, in 2006 (39.6%), and a sizeable increase from 2012, when fear for personal safety was at its third-lowest point (48.2%).

Fear while participating in an election is also at its highest recorded level (63.3%). This fear has increased by more than 50% since the question was first asked, in 2006 (41.1%), and it is representative of a longitudinal trend of rising fear and insecurity across much of the country. Increased fear is not restricted to elections: the number of respondents who report some or a lot of fear while participating in a demonstration has also reached its highest level ever, 75.2%, roughly a 25% increase over 2006 (60.6%). Fear when encountering the Taliban (93.1%) is nearly the same as in 2018 (93.6%), as is fear when encountering ISIS/Daesh (95.0% in 2019, 94.9% in 2018).

Nevertheless, a significant portion of the Afghan people do have hopes for the central government's security forces and do not find them to be repressive or a threat.¹⁵⁰

When respondents consider who provides security in their local area, a majority of 58.4% cite the Afghan National Police (ANP), an 11-point decline from 2018 (68.9%). Respondents in urban areas (79.2%) are more likely to name the ANP than those in rural areas (51.3%). Respondents in Nimroz (91.1%) and Kabul (85.6%) are most likely to name the ANP as the local security provider, while respondents in Sar-e-Pul (30.5%) are least likely.

The number of respondents who strongly agree that the ANP helps improve security in Afghanistan is at its lowest recorded level, 36.4%, down from 39.3% in 2018 and approximately 25% lower than 2007, when the question was first asked. The number of respondents who would strongly or somewhat agree with a family member's decision to join the ANP has risen by 3 percentage points, to 73.4%. Respondents in rural areas (74.4%) are marginally more likely to agree with such a decision than those in urban areas (70.3%).

Perceptions of the Afghan National Army (ANA) remain broadly similar to 2018, with a negligible increase in those saying the ANA is improving (57.5%, up from 56.9% in 2018). There are also minimal changes from 2018 in those saying the ANA helps to improve security (53.4% strongly agree), while the percentage who say the ANA protects civilians stands at 51.8%. A slight increase can be seen in those who say the ANA is honest and fair, from 58.3% in 2018 to 59.7% in 2019.

Afghan Central Government Forces that Survive Because of U.S. and Allied Outside Aid

SIGAR, LIG, and Department of Defense 1225 reporting all make it all too clear that Afghan government security forces only can fight and survive because of U.S. funding and aid. The Afghan central government budget cannot support these forces without external aid, and they have received massive amounts from the U.S. since 2002.

SIGAR reports that the United States appropriated approximately \$137.05 billion for reconstruction and related activities in Afghanistan since FY 2002 as of March 30, 2020. Total U.S. support of Afghanistan reconstruction funding was allocated as follows:¹⁵¹

- \$86.37 billion for security (including \$4.59 billion for counternarcotics initiatives)
- \$35.06 billion for governance and development (\$4.36 billion for counternarcotics initiatives)
- \$3.92 billion for humanitarian aid
- \$11.70 billion for civilian operations

An additional \$3.12 billion was provided by other NATO countries as part of the NATO-managed Afghan National Army (ANA) Trust Fund (NATO ANA Trust Fund or NATF).¹⁵²

These figures show that 65% of all U.S. reconstruction aid has gone to security, although much of it has been misspent, wasted, or stolen. **Chart Sixteen** displays SIGAR graphs that tell part of this story. These graphs look more like mountain ranges than aid programs and show the massive turbulence and short term peaks in security aid.

These peaks were driven in part by the action of the U.S. when it initially was far too optimistic about the lasting impact of its “defeat” of the Taliban in 2001-2002, began to fund new Afghan security forces, gave priority to Iraq, and then rushed funds to create a large Afghan force once it realized the size of the growing Taliban threat. Funding then dropped precipitously once President Obama decided in 2014 that U.S. troops would be withdrawn by 2016.

The full history of the efforts to create effective Afghan forces has yet to be written, but the efforts to build Afghan forces began slowly, were badly underfunded, and were constantly revised. Even the ANA did not have adequate trainers at even the basic training level until 2009-2010, and most were on short one-year tours.

Many of the U.S. and allied trainers assigned to training had no previous experience in the job until 2009-2010, and for several years, the system reported trainers as being active even if the donor country had only pledged them. Too much emphasis was put on basic and rear area training, and too little focus was put on “train and advise” at the combat unit level.

During 2014-2017 far too many of trainers who remained were removed from forward areas and brought back to the equivalent of the corps level. Help in developing combat skills and leadership was badly undercut in the ANA, and it was largely missing in the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the Afghan Local Police (ALP). This situation was corrected to some degree in 2017 by redeploying forward area trainers and creating Security Force Assistance Brigades, but the peace agreements seem to imply that the forward area deployments will be sharply cut if the peace negotiation efforts continue on schedule.

As has been noted earlier, the Department of Defense 1225 issued in June 2020 provides an updated description of the role of U.S. and allied security funding, and one that makes it all too clear that Afghan forces cannot develop or survive without indefinite outside funding. It lays out Afghanistan’s dependence on outside U.S. and other security aid in explicit detail,¹⁵³

The ANDSF continues to be funded primarily through the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF). This appropriation enables the Secretary of Defense, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State, to fund the Afghan Forces. The majority of ASFF is used for sustainment and operations of the Afghan forces. NATO Allies and partner nations also play a prominent role in the financial support of the ANDSF by contributing to the NATO ANA Trust Fund (NATF), which supports the ANA, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)-administered Law and Order Trust Fund (LOTFA) that pays the salaries of police and builds MoI capacity. In addition, the Afghan Government draws upon its domestic revenues to contribute to ANDSF sustainment operations for ANDSF personnel. The ANDSF will continue to depend on capacity building support and donor financial assistance in 2020 and beyond.

The United States provides the bulk of funding necessary to build, train, equip, and sustain the ANDSF through the ASFF. The ASFF provides the ANDSF with the resources needed to fund ongoing ANDSF operations while developing the ANDSF into an effective and independent force capable of securing Afghanistan, protecting the Afghan people, and contributing to regional security. The majority of ASFF funding is executed through DoD contracts on pseudo- FMS cases; the remainder is provided directly to the Afghan Government primarily to fund ANDSF pay, logistics, and facilities sustainment contracts. ASFF appropriations since FY 2005 total \$81.3 billion.

...NATO allies and partners will revisit their contributions prior to completion of the current 2017- 2020 funding cycle, as previously established at the 2016 Warsaw Summit. At the 2012 Chicago Summit, donors

agreed to support the training, equipping, financing, and capability development of the ANDSF until the end of 2017. At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, donor nations pledged about \$900 million in annual funding for the ANDSF until the end of 2020, totaling approximately 93 percent of the contributions pledged at Chicago Summit. The United States does not commit to a specific amount, but funds the majority of ANDSF requirements with ASFF.

International donors provide funding either on a bilateral basis or through one of two multi-lateral channels, the NATO ANA Trust Fund (NATF) and the LOTFA. Approximately one-half of annual international contributions pledged at Warsaw expect to flow through the NATF, with the remainder through LOTFA. U.S. funding is not part of the Warsaw commitment. To provide transparency and accountability, donor nations can participate in the Kabul-based ANDSF Funding Oversight and Coordination Body, co-chaired by the Afghan MoF and representatives from major international donors.

...The NATO ANA Trust Fund (NATF) serves as a flexible, transparent, and cost-effective mechanism to support and sustain the ANDSF. Created in 2007, the NATF was adapted, following agreement at the 2012 Chicago Summit, as part of NATO's commitment to support the training, equipping, financing, and capability development of the ANDSF beyond 2014. Over time, the scope of the Trust Fund expanded to support the sustainment of the ANA, literacy and professional military education, women's participation in the ANDSF, and capacity-building activities. In 2019, the NATF Office implemented GIRA/MoD review of proposed projects for sustainability and prioritization. These additional steps enhance the overall feasibility and ensure sustainment of completed projects.

The United States is responsible for overall trust fund management and execution of funds transferred from the SHAPE ANA Trust Fund Account to the ASFF in line with the ANA Trust Fund Implementation Plan and in line with national caveats on donated funds. Since the NATF's inception in 2007, 36 nations have contributed nearly \$3.1 billion. In 2019, nations pledged \$367.6 million, and \$381.8 million was donated, exceeding pledged amounts by \$14.2 million dollars. Several countries either donated without a pledge or exceeded their pledge. In 2020, 22 nations have pledged to contribute a total of \$379.9 million. As of May 5, 2020, 10 nations (including two that did not pledge) have donated a total of \$79.9 million.

...The June 2020 ANA Trust Fund plenary was rescheduled to the Fall of 2020 based on COVID-19 concerns.

...The UNDP has managed LOTFA since its inception in 2002. The UNDP receives and manages 50 donor contributions through LOTFA to pay the salaries of up to 124,626 members of the ANP CSTC-A coordinates closely with the UNDP regarding the use of LOTFA, and donor nations can participate in the LOTFA Project Board, which provides oversight over LOTFA-funded activities...The salaries of the 30,944 ALP are paid for solely by U.S. funds.

...The 2016 Afghan national budget allocated 24.7 billion Afghanis (\$387 million) for the ANDSF, falling just short of the goal in *afghani* terms. In 2017, the Afghan national budget allocated 26.9 billion Afghanis (\$396 million) and in 2018, the Afghan Government allocated 30.3 billion *afghani* (\$445 million) for the ANDSF. In 2020, the Afghan Government plans to allocate 34.1 billion *afghani* (\$448 million). Therefore, the Afghan Government has continued to meet its 2012 pledge. Given the persistence of the insurgency and continued slow growth of the Afghan economy, however, full self-sufficiency by 2024 does not appear realistic, even if levels of violence and, with it, the ANDSF force structure, reduce significantly. DoD continues to review the costs of ASFF-funded programs to ensure responsible stewardship of U.S. taxpayers' funds to address long-term affordability of the ANDSF.

The Afghan Government remains dependent on international support to fund both security and non-security sector costs. Donor nations are working with the Afghan Government to implement economic reforms with a goal to increase economic growth and government revenues. Continued international support for economic development is based on the Afghan Government's progress towards economic and social reforms necessary to remove constraints on private-sector investment to spur economic growth and job creation.

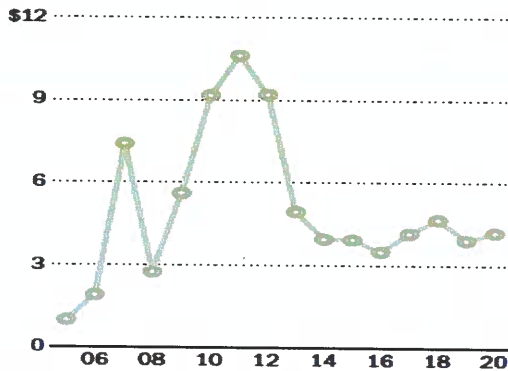
Realistically, however, Afghanistan will remain reliant on the international community to fund its forces, even in a post-reconciliation environment. Afghan government funding for its MoD and MoI forces—about \$500 million per year—is equivalent to about two percent of its GDP and about one fourth of total government revenues. It will be years before the Afghan economy would fully generate sufficient government

revenues to finance a peacetime force, even if there was no more risk that terrorist groups could use Afghanistan as a safe haven.

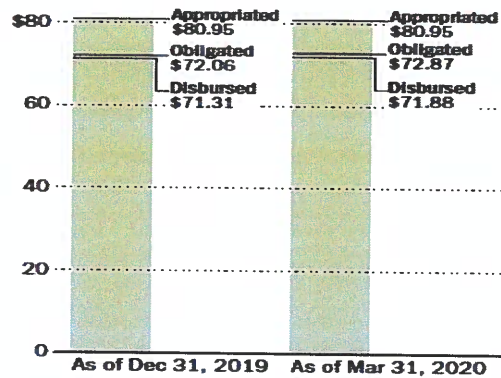
Chart Sixteen: The Massive Turbulence in Major Afghan Security Aid Programs

Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF)

ASFF APPROPRIATED FUNDS BY FISCAL YEAR
(\$ BILLIONS)

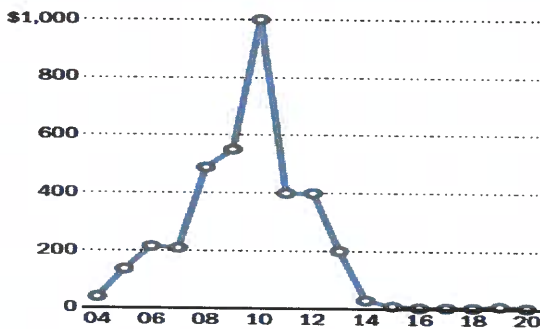


ASFF FUNDS, CUMULATIVE COMPARISON
(\$ BILLIONS)

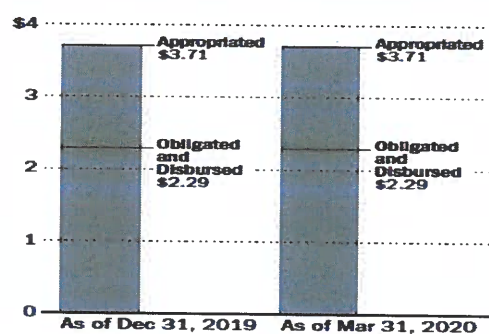


Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP)

CERP APPROPRIATIONS BY FISCAL YEAR
(\$ MILLIONS)

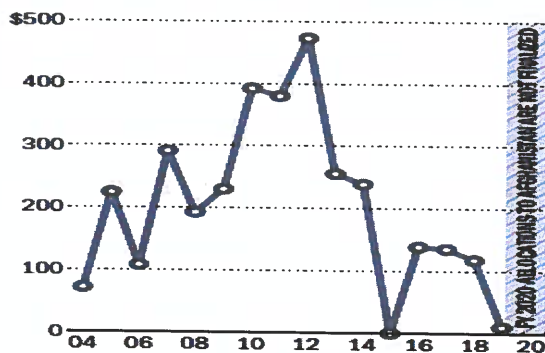


CERP FUNDS, CUMULATIVE COMPARISON
(\$ BILLIONS)

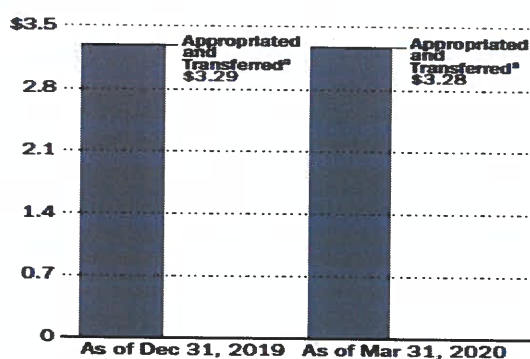


Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities (DICDA),

DICDA APPROPRIATIONS BY FISCAL YEAR
(\$ MILLIONS)



DICDA FUNDS, CUMULATIVE COMPARISON
(\$ BILLIONS)



Over-Classified Data Do Not Hide the Uncertain Capabilities of the ANDSF

The central government's Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) have made real progress over time, and many of the problems in their development were compounded from 2002-2012 by U.S. failures to provide adequate trainers and resources and by the annual rotation of most train and assist personnel. The fact remains, however, that they have now undergone nearly 20 years of efforts to reorganize, improve training, remove incompetent officers, limit corruption in the form of claiming pay for ghost soldiers, stealing wages and equipment, hoarding equipment in the rear, failing to provide leave, and many other abuses. The end result is still a force dependent on outside U.S. and allied aid with no clear point at which it will be adequate or self-sufficient.

Their current capabilities are described in the SIGAR and LIG reports for the first quarter of 2020, and in the Department of Defense semi-annual 1225 Report for June 2020. All three reports describe another round of improvements and new reforms, but they do little to describe the actual combat capabilities of Afghan forces and to quantify the level of real-world improvements in Afghan readiness and combat capability.

The 1225 Report in particular describes real progress in many areas, but it does so in much the same way as more than a decade of previous reports – listing new reforms and progress in old reforms without referencing the fact that more than a decade of previous reforms and claims of progress have proved to be sharply exaggerated actual progress. As was the case in Vietnam, such reporting tends to treat the development of national forces as if every year was the first year in such efforts.

As has been discussed earlier, the level of reporting has been affected by the steady classification of more and more data on Afghan forces. There has been a clear effort to “spin” reporting on the ANDSF in more favorable ways. The SIGAR report makes this clear, and states that,¹⁵⁴

- This quarter, RS for the first time restricted from public release all data on enemy-initiated attacks (EIA) and effective enemy-initiated attacks (EEIA).
- USFOR-A continued to classify or otherwise restrict from public release the following types of data due to Afghan government classification guidelines or other restrictions (mostly since October 2017)
 - ANDSF casualties, by force element and total
 - most unit-level ANDSF authorized and assigned strengths
 - detailed Ministry of Defense (MOD), Ministry of Interior (MOI), and ANDSF performance assessments
 - information about the operational readiness of ANA and ANP equipment
 - some Special Mission Wing (SMW) information, including the number and type of airframes in the SMW inventory, the number of pilots and aircrew, and the operational readiness (and associated benchmarks) of SMW airframes
- USFOR-A classified all ANDSF casualty information this quarter because the Afghan government classifies it.
- USFOR-A continued to classify detailed assessments of ANDSF performance because the Afghan government classifies them.
- USFOR-A continued to classify most information about MOD and MOI performance because it was classified by the Afghan government.

Ten Areas of Uncertain Progress Towards Developing the Capability for Independent Operations

The 1225 Report is more political. It lists ten areas of progress without referencing the successes and failures in past efforts at reform and without fully describing the levels of the current problems in the ANDSF and current progress. It does, however, show that serious problems still exist, and the following excerpts provide introduction to the challenges such problems now raise for the peace process:¹⁵⁵

Leader Development: RS advisors focused their efforts on senior leaders within the MoD and MoI that are reliable partners. The focus on leader development across the ANDSF has been on institutionalizing processes and organizations that professionalize the force and build a cadre of future leaders. For example in the ANA, the focus has been on ensuring Kandak and brigade levels commanders attend the pre-command course (PCC) prior to leading an organization ... The MOI does not have a PCC equivalent but are implementing other initiatives to train and mentor senior leaders in the ANP. (31)

Reducing Checkpoints: Most successful Taliban attacks against ANDSF forces occurred at poorly manned static checkpoints (CPs). The Taliban targets these checkpoints to harass the ANDSF, increase ANDSF attrition, and capture ANDSF equipment with which to resupply Taliban fighters. RS like ISAF before that—has focused on checkpoint consolidation and reduction for years. However, small, poorly defended, and redundant checkpoints remain prevalent due to political sensitivities and the fact that checkpoints provide a visible, albeit false, sense of security...During this reporting period, RS and senior Afghan leaders focused significantly on reducing the number of checkpoints. (31)

Counter-Corruption

Corruption, including corruption of Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF)-funded commodities like fuel, undermines ANDSF readiness and combat power. RS continues to apply pressure on senior ANDSF leaders to enforce stewardship and accountability of U.S.-funded support. RS has focused advising efforts on trusted partners who demonstrate a willingness to take action against corruption. For example, in 2019, the Minister of Defense (MINDEF) realigned the MoD Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to report directly to MINDEF and to be led by a major general. Previously, MoD CID consisted of 69 investigators, led by a colonel, who reported to the ANA General Staff's Legal section with all the agents aligned under the corps commanders. The realignment grew the organization to 133 investigators and administrative personnel and 138 military police and re-organized the field personnel into five zones, not attached to any particular Corps.

MoD CID continues to develop as an independent entity, and has made progress in the nearly seven months since the Interim Director was appointed. Prior to his arrival, the organization was leaderless and stagnant. Since his appointment, the Interim Director has aggressively sought qualified officers to fill the *Tashkil*...In 2019, the MINDEF signed an Ethics and Military Conduct Policy for all MoD personnel. Unfortunately, the final product signed by the MINDEF did not include enforcement mechanisms or consequences for failure to comply...

...The Minister of Interior has increased focus on reducing corruption in order to change the public perception of the police force. During this reporting period, the Deputy Minister for Security identified the most corrupt checkpoints within the MoI and made arrests and follow on prosecutions of individuals engaging in these activities. The MoI Corruption Major Crimes Task Force (MCTF) made more than 100 arrests of corrupt individuals within the reporting period. On November 2, 2019, the President of Afghanistan (PoA) issued a decree regarding the Afghan National and Security Forces (ANDSF) for the purpose of building relations between police and the public, enforcing the rule of law, and reducing ANDSF corruption at checkpoints....

Improving Logistics: The greatest improvement of the ANA/ANP distribution processes has been the successful establishment of the AAF channel flight program with weekly flights from Kabul to Herat, Shorab, Khandahar, and Mazer-e-sharif. These routine flights are providing more predictability and ability to move critical cargo. TAA by several RS organizations, including 3rd SFAB, TAAC-Air, and MAG-Air was able to fix the aerial distribution problem. Distribution of supplies by ground remains challenged due to security concerns as larger convoys are susceptible to enemy activity.

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Improving Accountability of Equipment: ...The long-term intent of Core-IMS is to provide the ANDSF with a digital base for its logistics program to grow and mature as the security environment in Afghanistan stabilizes. Advisors continue to support the implementation of automated systems that increase accountability of materiel procured and provided to the ANDSF with U.S. funds. Although use of the Core-IMS as a logistics automation system continues, the ANDSF remain challenged to fully implement Core-IMS across the ANDSF. During the reporting period, RS senior advisors focused on strategic level buy-in to the utilization and benefits of the Core-IMS, but tactical implementation remained a challenge. During this reporting period, the MoI demonstrated a renewed commitment to implementing Core-IMS. Additionally, the ANP improved in closing out in-transit tickets so that the Core-IMS accurately reflects on-hand and in-transit equipment.

FMS Life Cycle Management (LCM): During the period from October 2018 through March 2020, the SAO managed \$1.68 billion worth of FY 2019 pseudo-FMS cases and \$278 million worth of FY 2020 pseudo-FMS cases. SAO oversaw a total of 106 ongoing FY 2019 and FY 2020 cases... SAO manages a newly established southern vehicle transfer waypoint in Kandahar and a waypoint near Kabul. The increased efficiency of both waypoints will enhance vehicle distribution to the southern and western ANDSF elements, while facilitating the steady flow of vehicles and parts into and across Afghanistan. The southern waypoints reduce annual transportation costs, reduce vehicle transit time by about 60 days, and minimize the risk of damage during transportation.

... Once the SAO delivers and title transfers FMS materiel to the Afghan Government, materiel oversight and life-cycle management turns over to the corresponding coalition requirement owner, with appropriate reach-back support from acquisition program managers in DoD. For example, TAAC-Air maintains oversight and life-cycle management of all FMS-procured aircraft, whereas program managers in the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Army provide life-cycle management of the fixed-wing and rotary-wing fleets, respectively. CSTC-A's Operations Sustainment Branch maintains the same oversight and life-cycle management of all FMS-procured weapons, ammunition, vehicles, pharmaceuticals, repair parts, and OCIE, reaching back to program managers in the United States Army to manage the National Maintenance Strategy-Ground Vehicle Support (NMS-GVS) and procurement of tactical vehicles and ammunition.

... Although equipment transferred to the Afghan government is not U.S. property, U.S. advisors and personnel continue to develop the ministries' logistics and distribution practices to ensure supplies, equipment, and weaponry supplied by the United States are appropriately distributed, employed, and accounted for by the ANA and ANP in accordance with security assistance policy and law. Core-IMS serves as the primary tool to maintain property accountability and oversight.

End-Use Monitoring Equipment provided to the ANDSF is subject to end-use monitoring (EUM). In Afghanistan, DoD administers two types of EUM: routine and enhanced. For non-sensitive equipment provided to the ANDSF, the SAO conducts routine monitoring in conjunction with other required security assistance duties... Enhanced EUM for sensitive articles and technologies is more intensive and formal. Enhanced EUM includes equipment delivery records with serial numbers, routine physical inventories of the equipment by serial number, and quarterly reporting on inventory results. In Afghanistan, night-vision devices (NVD) are the primary articles requiring enhanced EUM, but additional articles like raid towers and aerostats also require enhanced EUM. Security conditions and personnel present unique challenges to SAO's ability to conduct Enhanced EUM and Routine EUM. TAA Restrictions caused by the fragile security situation and COVID-19 have degraded the Enhanced EUM site inspection capability.

Reducing Attrition through Better Care of Soldiers and Police: Attrition remains problematic within the ANA and ANP and the most significant issue affecting ANA and ANP efforts to reach full strength. The number of personnel "dropped from the rolls" (DFR), which occurs when a member has been absent without leave (AWOL) for more than 30 days, continues to dominate overall attrition statistics. DFR accounted for 66 percent of ANA and 73 percent of ANP attrition during the reporting period. DFRs occur for a variety of reasons, including poor unit leadership, low pay or delays in pay, austere living conditions, denial of leave,

and intimidation by insurgents. The single greatest contributor to DFRs is poor leadership. Advisory focus on key reforms, leadership development, pay, and checkpoint reductions have a secondary effect by improving care for soldiers and police and reducing the threat of factors that negatively impact attrition.

Standardization of Training: The Unified Training, Education and Doctrine Command (UTEDC) provides “unity of command” and coordinates all efforts related to institutional training and education, as well as efforts in support of training fielded forces, and provides the MoD with an organization responsible for developing doctrine and training programs to inform activity within branch schools and PME institutions. UTEDC achieved full operational capacity (FOC) *during this reporting period* and enhanced its command and control over its training institutions. The UTEDC staff and subordinate directorates have succeeded in developing basic procedures for effective staff and directorate coordination.

Better MoD and MoI Budget Execution: The MoD and MoI continue to struggle with budget execution, which averaged a 60 percent execution rate during the last fiscal year. Within the MoD and MoI, the contract award processes through the Requirements Approval Board (RAB) and Procurement Approval Board (PAB) and execution rates remained uneven and the standard procurement process remains slow. Both the MoD and MoI submitted prioritized procurement plans for the new fiscal year. The primary focus areas for resource management advisors are to develop capable and effective senior procurement and finance leaders, improve adherence to existing procurement and financial process and procedures, and continued oversight of ASFF resources.

Improving Processes for Paying Soldier and Police Salaries: APPS is currently the Human Resources and Payroll System of record for MoD and the HR system of record for MoI. MoI currently utilizes the WEPS system for payroll. The change from a manual paper-based process to the implementation of an APPS electronic-based process presents initial challenges but with the policy, programmatic and technical expertise advisement from CSTC-A, the ministries continue to make significant progress... Due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions placed on Afghan's travel and ministry working hours, the Ministry of Interior recommended a three-month delay. The overall end state is for APPS to be the Human Resource System of Records for the Ministry of Interior. The utilization of APPS to inform the payroll process through WEPS will increase the accountability and oversight of LOTFA funds...Based on Afghan reporting, which cannot be independently verified, the MoD has about 3,600 personnel that still need to be enrolled and slotted in APPS and about 179,000 personnel who are entered and thus fully eligible to be paid using FY2020 ASFF. For the MoI there are ~117,000 enrolled but there could be as many as 125,000 on the ground. Their pay is funded primarily by other donor nations, not by ASFF.

Improving ANDSF Facilities: Limited local oversight and slow procurement processes limit ANDSF ability to maintain facilities. To address this problem, RS has identified points of need such as the ministries' execution of their operation and maintenance contracts, connection to the commercial electric grid, and optimizing existing infrastructure rather than seeking new construction.

Manning Estimates and Attrition

Unclassified reporting to the Congress by the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) and the Lead Inspector General (LIG) also highlight the instability and gaps within the Afghan forces, although it now seems likely that more such reporting will now be classified and cease to be reported in the open source SIGAR and LIG reports.¹⁵⁶

Chart Seventeen shows that current manning estimates are now significantly lower than in 2017, although they rose by 3% in the first quarter of 2020. This drop comes partly from efforts to get more honest reporting and eliminate “ghost” soldiers from the totals reported. At the same time, SIGAR reports that, “ANDSF personnel strength numbers sourced from APPS is 8% lower (roughly 25,000 personnel) than the Afghan-provided strength data reported during the same period in 2019 under the previous Afghan Human Resource Information Management System (AHRIMS).”

The net results reflect a significant shortfall in meeting the authorized personnel levels,¹⁵⁷

As of December 2019, the ANDSF's total authorized strength is roughly 352,000 (227,103 MOD and 124,626 MOI) plus 30,000 ALP funded by the United States and the Afghan government. The authorized strength includes 11,663 civilians (5,790 MOD and 5,873 MOI). This quarter's ANDSF assigned strength stands at 80% (roughly 70,000 personnel short) of its 352,000 authorized strength.

The trends in **Chart Seventeen** also reflect the fact that attrition became a critical issue before the peace agreements were signed. SIGAR reports that,¹⁵⁸

DOD and RS have identified attrition as one of the "Top 10 Challenges and Opportunities" for building the capacity of the ANDSF. According to DOD, personnel dropped from the rolls (DFR) account for the greatest portion of ANA and ANP attrition rates, but DFR rates for both have been improving. DOD said the most common reasons for DFRs are poor unit leadership (generally the biggest contributor), low pay or delays in pay, austere living conditions, denial of leave, and intimidation by insurgents. ANDSF advisors are tackling these problems by focusing on encouraging key reforms, leadership development, properly handling ANDSF pay, and reducing the use of checkpoints, which all have the secondary effect of improving care for soldiers and police, and reducing factors that negatively impact attrition...

CSTC-A reported last quarter that the ministers of defense and interior have ordered MOD and MOI personnel to improve attrition by reducing absence without leave and increasing the re-enlisting of personnel separated from the force. These efforts may take time to yield results. Both MOD and MOI elements usually self-report an average quarterly attrition of about 2–3% of the force.

The SIGAR and LIG reports on the level of fluctuation in manning levels are only one of the many ongoing warnings that there is not a stable build-up of experience and warfighting quality in the ANDSF as a whole – including ANDSF forces and internal security forces, and especially police and local forces. The promise of reform must also be considered in the light of similar promises that have not been made for more than the last decade.

Retention is a critical issue even though many young Afghan men have virtually no alternative employment. Moreover, the reports on force progress in readiness and training in the SIGAR and LIG reports do not reflect the kind of improvements in force quality that will allow ANDSF forces to substitute for U.S. and other NATO forces in 14 months if there are any serious challenges made by the Taliban to the peace process – or at any time in the next few years.

The role played by U.S. land elements like the Security Assistance Force Brigades, Special Forces and other elite land combat elements, and the CIA is also critical. The United States is committed to reducing its troop levels in Afghanistan to 8,600 within 135 days of the February 29, 2020 agreement – or all U.S. troops within 14 months *if* the Taliban fully meet their commitments. The pace and scale of such U.S. cuts remains unclear, but the SIGAR April 2020 *Quarterly Report* sounds a warning,¹⁵⁹

Defense Secretary Mark Esper and General Miller have said they believe that a force of 8,600 is adequate to undertake both U.S. missions in Afghanistan outlined under Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS): the unilateral U.S. counterterrorism mission and the U.S. contribution to NATO's Resolute Support (RS) mission to train, advise, and assist (TAA) the ANDSF. Defense officials have not yet articulated how an eventual drawdown below the 8,600 level might impact both missions.¹⁶⁰

Substantial and continued U.S. and international financial, military and contractor support is required to sustain the ANDSF as it is currently constituted. Without support, the ANDSF will struggle to maintain and operate certain types of equipment, vehicles, and aircraft; provide consistent logistics support across the force; and root out fuel-related and other corruption across its ranks.¹⁶¹

... Secretary Esper said that once U.S. troops are at 8,600, "we're going to stop, and we'll assess the situation, not just tactically on the ground but also are all the parties living up to their obligations, their commitments? Are they acting in good faith and showing good effort?" The new troop-level target is a roughly 4,000-person reduction from the 2,000–13,000 personnel reported by DOD on December 7, 2019. For several months,

Secretary Esper has said a force of 8,600 represents a force optimization, and can perform both U.S. missions in Afghanistan outlined under Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS): the unilateral U.S. counter terrorism mission and the U.S. contribution to NATO's RS mission to train, advise, and assist (TAA) the ANDSF... Defense officials have not yet articulated how an eventual drawdown below the 8,600 level could impact both missions.¹⁶²

NATO's latest reported figure for the RS mission is 16,551 Coalition military personnel as of February 2020, including 8,000 U.S. personnel and 8,551 military personnel from NATO and non-NATO partner nations... Other U.S. troops in the OFS mission in Afghanistan serve in supporting roles, train Afghan special forces, or conduct air and counterterror operations...¹⁶³

These figures were published before the U.S. troop drawdown began in earnest, as well as before the commensurate drawdown of other Coalition nations' forces, meaning that the current RS mission is likely smaller. Referring to the RS mission's size in a meeting of NATO foreign ministers in early April, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said "to support the peace efforts, we are reducing our presence to around 12,000 by the summer," but "no decision for a further reduction has been taken and all of our steps will be conditions-based."¹⁶⁴

Separate from U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan are the DOD contractors who provide essential in-country support to U.S. forces and the ANDSF. As of April 2020, 27,641 contractors were serving in Afghanistan, about 40% (11,077) of whom were third-country nationals, 39% (10,711) were U.S. citizens, and 21% (5,853) were local nationals, or more than twice the number of U.S. troops currently in country. These contractors fulfill an array of important responsibilities, with most providing logistics and maintenance support (34%), security (19%), and support for U.S. military bases (14%), and the rest providing construction, translation and interpretation, transportation, training, and other services...¹⁶⁵

The U.S.-Taliban agreement provides that "The United States is committed to withdraw from Afghanistan all military forces of the United States, its allies, and Coalition partners, including all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting service personnel" within 14 months. State declined to comment publicly on the issue of whether U.S.-funded contractors and other support personnel for the ANDSF are among those to be withdrawn... Contractors provide mission-essential support to the ANDSF in a number of areas, including some critical and costly U.S.-funded programs, such as Afghan Air Force (AAF) aircraft and ANDSF ground vehicles.¹⁶⁶

The forward deployed and combat elements of U.S. forces are small before the peace agreements, but they still underpinned the forward area training and combat support of the best ANDSF land forces, and even the current reductions in such forces may have a critical impact. ANDSF land forces are not ready to fight the Taliban without U.S. support if anything goes wrong with the peace process.

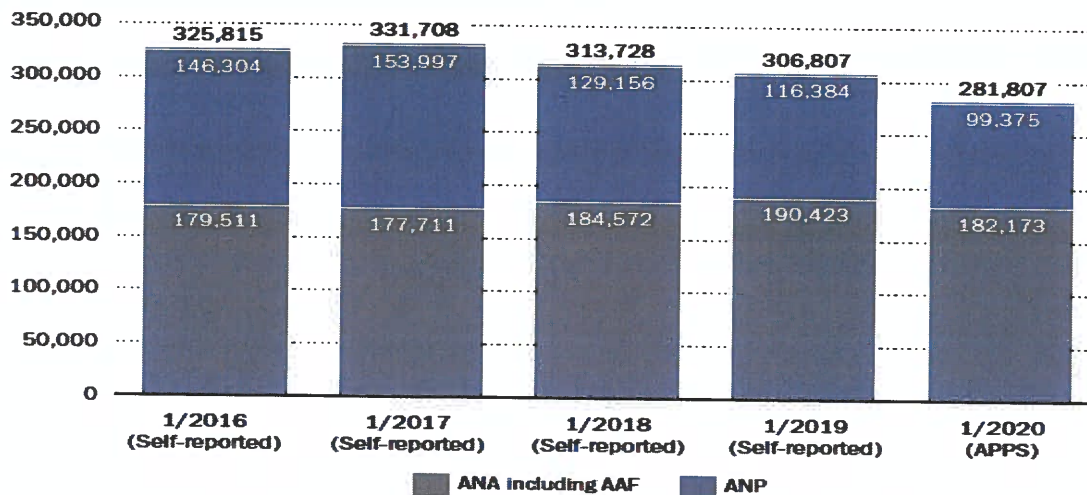
One key aspect of such cuts is that U.S. reductions are likely to cut both "persistent training" and "period training" of forward deployed ANA and ANP forces – a key command priority before the peace agreements that were signed. SIGAR noted that, "According to USFOR-A, the ANDSF this quarter continued to build capacity to self-sustain through persistent Coalition-force advising of the ANA and ANP," with all the ANA corps and 30% of the ANP provincial chiefs of police (PCOPs) identified as the "targeted echelons for persistent advising" and the other PCOPS and ANA brigades as the targeted echelon for "periodic advising."¹⁶⁷

The Afghan side of the training process has improved over time, but it is still weak and has serious problems with corruption. Moreover, the Afghan government has yet to show that it can even properly allocate the limited elite forces – like the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) – it already has without U.S. help and guidance.¹⁶⁸

The same is true of the lack of progress in the Afghan Air Force. The Air Force is making progress, but that progress falls far short of the levels that would allow it to be a replacement for the U.S. airpower described earlier.

Chart Seventeen: Shifts in Afghan National Security Force Manning: 2016-2020

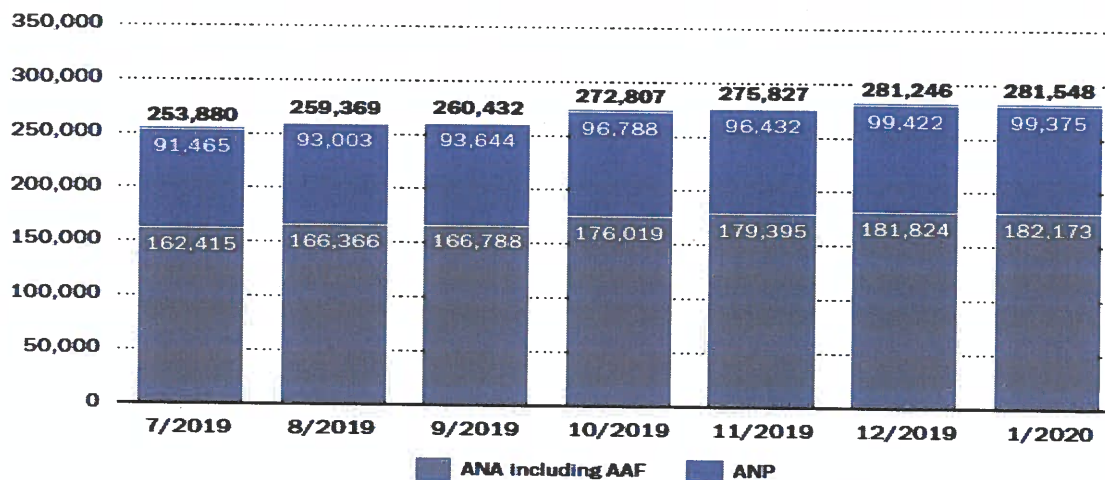
REPORTED ANDSF ASSIGNED STRENGTH SINCE 2016



Note: This quarter's data is as of January 26, 2020. ANA = Afghan National Army; AAF = Afghan Air Force; ANP = Afghan National Police; ANDSF = Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. No civilians are included in strength numbers. ANA strength numbers include the AAF and trainees, transfers, holdovers, and student personnel. ANP strength numbers do not include "standby" personnel, generally reservists, or personnel not in service while completing training. The change in strength numbers from 2019 to 2020 is due to the transition of strength reporting from ANDSF-reported figures to reporting from the Afghan Personnel and Pay System (APPS). The strength numbers reported here should not be viewed as exact: CSTC-A and SIGAR have long noted many data-consistency issues with ANDSF strength numbers, and CSTC-A always provides the caveat that it cannot validate ANDSF strength data for accuracy.

Source: CSTC-A response to SIGAR data call, 3/17/2020; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 4/30/2016, 4/30/2017, 4/30/2018, 4/30/2019; SIGAR, analysis of CSTC-A-provided data, 4/2020.

REPORTED ANDSF ASSIGNED STRENGTH FROM APPS



Note: This quarter's data is as of January 26, 2020. The "as of" date of the data each quarter is between the 25th and 31st of the indicated month. ANA = Afghan National Army; AAF = Afghan Air Force; ANP = Afghan National Police; ANDSF = Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. No civilians are included in the strength numbers.

Source: CSTC-A response to SIGAR data call, 3/17/2020, 12/19/2019, and 9/18/2019; SIGAR, analysis of CSTC-A-provided data, 4/2020.

SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to Congress*, April 30, 2020, pp. 75-76.

Detailed Warnings of the Problems in the Afghan Security Forces

The structure of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) is highly complex and each element has its own successes and challenges. The overall structure and size of each current force element in the ANDSF is summarized in **Chart Eighteen**, based on the DoD 1225 Report for June 2020.

These problems in the ANDSF should not be exaggerated. The DoD 1225 Report and the SIGAR and LIG reports all document real progress. However, each report to date has raised a long list of troubling comments about the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), and the most recent reports do the same.

These lists are long, and some comments are technical. It takes time to absorb the details, but they provide a much clearer picture of the many limits to Afghan forces, their dependence on outside aid, and the fact that a limited number of elite Afghan National Army units have often had to assume too much of the burden of demanding duties and heavy fighting and then have been dispersed to routine duties without time to recover and retrain.

The SIGAR *Quarterly Report for January 1, 2020 to March 31, 2020* raises a wide range of issues for most of the elements of the ANDSF, as well as flags yet another set of “reforms” – some of which reflect efforts to solve problems that were flagged in past U.S. reports and also called for major reform efforts. Most never led to the planned progress, and some plans for reform now date back as far as 2003.¹⁶⁹

- Substantial and continued U.S. and international financial, military and contractor support is required to sustain the ANDSF as it is currently constituted. Without support, the ANDSF will struggle to maintain and operate certain types of equipment, vehicles, and aircraft; provide consistent logistics support across the force; and root out fuel-related and other corruption across its ranks. However, DOD reported that the ANDSF has made some recent, notable improvements in implementing systems such as the Afghan Personnel and Pay System (APPS), which accounts for ANDSF personnel and generates payroll calculations for the MOD, as well as the continuing growth and increasing capabilities of the Afghan Air Force (AAF) and the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF).¹⁷⁰
- CSTC-A is adopting a new method for assessing, monitoring, and evaluating ANDSF performance to enable RS to “assess the people, places (units), and processes that are most vital to the viability of the ANDSF.” The new method, like the prior one, is built into the Advisor Network (ANET), the electronic system used by RS advisors to track engagements with and assess the performance and progress of their ANDSF counterparts... It is slated to become available for advisor inputs in April, with baseline assessments expected to be available to CSTC-A in May 2020...¹⁷¹
- CSTC-A told SIGAR this quarter that it believes the new evaluation method will be a significant improvement over the previous, narrative-only advisor evaluations. The old narrative assessments made it difficult for advisors and RS staff and leadership to use ANET in any meaningful way because the assessments were too subjective, or lacked historical context. ...To increase rigor and reduce the possibility of arbitrary evaluations, the new method uses a Likert scale—a tool commonly used in surveys to measure respondents’ attitudes, perceptions, or opinions, as in the common strongly agree/agree/neutral/disagree/strongly disagree rating questions...STC-A believes that using the Likert scale will generate quantifiable performance data that can reflect historical trend lines, making assessments useful for the command.¹⁷²
- CSTC-A hopes this will improve U.S. and Coalition TAA efforts by objectives and efforts measured in the revamped ANET are not based solely on the Top 10 Challenges and Opportunities. For example, progress on ANDSF gender-related efforts are not specifically identified as one of the Top 10 Challenges and Opportunities, but are included in ANET because CSTC-A sees them as “important measures that help RS understand the overall progress of the ANDSF’s manner of governance.”¹⁷³

- This new method is the latest in a long history of DOD changing the methods it uses to assess ANDSF performance. Since 2010, U.S. and Coalition forces in Afghanistan have used at least four different methods, including the Commander's Unit Assessment Tool (CUAT) from roughly 2010 to 2013, the Regional Command Assessment Report (RASR) from 2014 to 2015, the Monthly ANDSF Assessment Report (MAAR) from 2015 to 2016, and the security tracker for the Afghanistan Compact from late-2017 until recently. SIGAR has reported issues with each of these past systems, including that they did not provide a clear picture of ANDSF capabilities, had methodological inconsistencies that prevented identifying performance trend lines, or that data gathered on ANDSF performance using these systems became classified focusing them on the Top 10 Challenges and Opportunities that must be addressed in order for the ANDSF to become "institutionally viable," meaning effective, affordable, and sustainable.¹⁷⁴
- ...This quarter, DOD reported on RS efforts to optimize its TAA efforts and achieve unity of effort by empowering its Ministerial Advisory Groups for Defense (MAG-D) and Interior (MAG-I) and by realigning the 12 branches conducting ministerial advising under the direction and guidance of the MAGs. RS advisors who routinely engage with the MOD and MOI will now coordinate efforts through the MAGs to ensure consistency when communicating with Afghan officials.¹⁷⁵
- ANDSF personnel strength numbers sourced from APPS are 8% lower (roughly 25,000 personnel) than the Afghan-provided strength data reported during the same period in 2019 under the previous Afghan Human Resource Information Management System (AHRIMS). This is significant because assigned-strength numbers help inform CSTCA's decision-making on how much money to provide for ANDSF salary and incentive payments, as well as for certain types of equipment.¹⁷⁶
- CSTC-A said it has deactivated 59,777 MOD and 6,539 MOI personnel records in APPS from July 1, 2018, through January 26, 2020. CSTC-A told SIGAR there are several reasons why ANDSF personnel records are retained in APPS after an individual is deactivated. First, it is very common for soldiers and police to return after long breaks in service. Retaining all personnel records within APPS makes it easier to reintegrate returning personnel. Second, if an individual is released for misconduct and tries to rejoin or join another service, the system can flag it. Third, as in the U.S. and other militaries around the world, retaining personnel records in the system allows for future verification of an individual's service if needed.¹⁷⁷
- A key area of ANDSF performance improvement due to Coalition TAA this quarter was in checkpoint reduction, which RS has long identified as a priority. Dispersing troops among scattered checkpoints reduces overall combat power and offers targets for insurgent attacks. USFOR-A reported that the ANDSF is implementing its checkpoint-reduction plan based on intelligence estimates and analysis of enemy activity. USFOR-A says that the checkpoint-reduction plan has enhanced security in key districts while simultaneously reducing checkpoints that are less operationally important. They also said reducing the number of checkpoints has helped the ANDSF plan and execute operations to deny the enemy key terrain. These factors were "significant contributors" to higher ANDSF performance ratings....¹⁷⁸
- As of late March, MOD has reduced 220 checkpoints and repositioned its soldiers into 49 newly built patrol bases (the new standard fortified fighting structures for the MOD) or 19 checkpoints that were improved to become patrol bases. MOI has closed approximately 197 of the 200 checkpoints initially identified as the most dangerous for their personnel. While CSTC-A said checkpoint-reduction efforts have a long way to go—the ANDSF began with over 10,000 checkpoints locations across Afghanistan—CSTC-A assesses that its TAA efforts have "resulted in a marked improvement with respect to [its checkpoint] objectives."¹⁷⁹
- The creation of Regional Targeting Teams (RTTs), an effort supported by NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A) advisors, is another development that has led to better ANDSF command and control capabilities at the regional level. RTTs now incorporate representatives from all regional ANDSF elements including the ANA, ANP, Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF), and the National Directorate of Security. This has led to the ANDSF's ability to coordinate and synchronize combat operations, increase the accuracy of operational reporting, and decrease decision-making times required to provide assets to an operation, improving their response to security crises across each region.¹⁸⁰
- USFOR-A said the ANA corps are still working to fully develop their combined-arms capabilities, reduce static checkpoints, decrease response times to enemy activity, and protect areas of strategic value to the Afghan government.¹⁸¹

- Coalition force advisors assess that most ANA brigades demonstrated growth in “institutional viability” over the quarter, in (1) leadership development, (2) training, (3) personnel readiness, (4) attrition, and (5) sustainment. ANA brigades improved and are performing at or slightly above the “partially capable” rating in these categories.¹⁸²
- DOD reported in December 2019 that ASSF elements are on track to double in size by the end of 2020, a reform goal laid out for developing the force in 2016 in President Ashraf Ghani’s four-year ANDSF Road Map.¹⁸³
- 53% of this quarter’s ASSF operations were conducted independently by the ASSF and 47% were Coalition-partnered or -enabled, compared to last quarter’s 24% independent and 76% Coalition-partnered or -enabled operations. Prior to this quarter’s increase in independent ASSF ground operations, NSOCC-A said independent operations had declined due to a shift in advisor focus last summer from increasing ASSF’s independent operations to tackling issues with the misuse of the force.¹⁸⁴
- While misuse is generally declining, it remains an important problem. For example, NSOCC-A, the element that advises the ANASOC, told SIGAR this quarter that, in one type of misuse, about 1,200 (6%) of roughly 19,000 ANASOC commandos are currently manning checkpoints instead of conducting offensive operations. (In June 2019, about 3,000 commandos were on checkpoint duty.) An additional 2,500 commandos are currently serving in other inappropriate conventional roles, meaning that a total of at least 3,700 ANASOC commandos (around 20% of the force) are being misused.¹⁸⁵
- Similarly, the NSOCC-A continues to report problems with the misuse of the Special Mission Wing (SMW), the special-operations aviation unit that supports counterterrorism and counternarcotics ASSF missions. Because the SMW is designed and trained to have more specialized skills than the AAF, Afghan leaders frequently task the SMW with general support missions that the AAF are meant to conduct. The extent of the problem is apparent in the breakdown of mission sorties provided by NSOCC-A this quarter. In January and February 2020, the SMW conducted 321 sorties, nearly half of which (155, or 48%) were general support missions for ASSF and non-ASSF units outside the SMW’s mission set, with the other 166 sorties were appropriate (145 counterterrorism, 12 counternarcotics, and nine counternexus missions, which have both a counterterrorism and counternarcotics purpose).¹⁸⁶
- In another change, MOD has merged its 13 branch schools into four “capability schools,” (which focus on combat arms, combat support, combat service support, and general service)...despite the growing numbers of soldiers attending these schools, DOD says the ANA still needs to provide soldiers with more advanced training and expertise in order to reduce casualties.¹⁸⁷
- This quarter, CSTC-A’s Counter-Corruption Advisory Group (CCAG) found that previous reports in December 2019 that conditions were improving at the Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC), MOD’s troubled main training center, were based on inaccurate information provided to MAG-D by a corrupt senior MOD official...This senior official was actively attempting to cover up problems, having directed a fraudulent MOD IG investigation to obfuscate true KMTC conditions.¹⁸⁸
- The Afghan National Army Territorial Force (ANA-TF) is the newest ANDSF force element and is responsible for holding terrain in permissive security environments. Falling directly under the command of the regular ANA corps, the ANA-TF is designed to be a lightly armed local security force that is more accountable to the government than local forces like the ALP. DOD says that some of the ANA-TF companies may replace conventional ANA companies, where authorizations exist, in areas where conditions are appropriate for the units to thrive. Following a final intra-Afghan peace deal...¹⁸⁹
- DOD assesses that the ANA-TF or similar construct may serve as a vehicle to reintegrate insurgent fighters... CSTC-A reported this quarter that the ANA-TF to lays largely struggled to gain full integration and acceptance from the ANA because the ANA-TF is a relatively new force element that is reliant on the regular ANA corps for leadership and supplies. CSTC-A said many ANA leaders fail to fully integrate the ANA-TF into their organizational hierarchy, but that CSTC-A’s TAA efforts and resultant focus on the growing ANA-TF by MOD leadership is beginning to yield increased integration and acceptance of the program. The recent reassignment of several ANA corps commanders has led to improved utilization and integration of the ANA-TF into ANA operations... Based on remaining integration concerns, RS recently placed a hold on the ANA-TF expansion to allow time and space for the ANA to focus on how integrating the ANA-TF impacts the ANA’s institutional viability.¹⁹⁰

- According to DOD, the ANP are currently focused on transitioning from a semi-paramilitary security force to a more traditional police force that focuses on “community policing” and the rule of law. Over time, the Coalition has refocused its efforts away from combat training for the ANP towards community policing. As part of this transition, between June and December 2019, MOI replaced 27 out of 34 provincial chiefs of police. CSTC-A believes that while MOI has the institutional training capability to create professional police officers, “the combination of corrupt leadership within the ANP training pipeline and the ongoing conflict throughout the country hinders the MOI’s ability to transition from a paramilitary to a community policing force.”¹⁹¹

The *LIG Quarterly Report* for the same period raises many of the same issues, and additional ones as well. It does, however, limit the main focus of its comments to the ANA.¹⁹²

- Last quarter, CSTC-A reported that it changed the method by which advisors assess, monitor, and evaluate progress within the MoD and Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoI). This included standardizing metrics to assess the effectiveness of TAA efforts by incorporating the “assess, monitor, and evaluate” objectives that guide CSTC-A’s advising efforts.¹⁹³
- This quarter, CSTC-A reported to the DoD OIG that advisors now use “assess, monitor, and evaluate” functions in the ANET system as part of their daily TAA activities. CSTC-A stated that making the assessment part of the daily TAA activity improves the ability to monitor the performance as well as the ability to evaluate the overall progress of Afghan institutions. In this way, a more complete, consistent, and accurate understanding of ANDSF abilities is possible over time.¹⁹⁴
- However, CSTC-A’s regular revision of the methodology for tracking ministerial progress and establishing a new baseline for its methodology and metrics makes it difficult to track progress over time. Previous Lead IG reports have stated that these changes make it difficult for the DoD OIG to assess progress of TAA efforts.¹⁹⁵
- For several years, USFOR-A has reported that the ANDSF relies too heavily on operating small checkpoints throughout the country... These checkpoints typically are temporary positions staffed by 10 to 20 soldiers and/or police without dependable logistics support or officer leadership... While checkpoints are intended to provide visible assurances to the local population that the government is providing security, the ANDSF assigned to static positions reduces the number of forces available to conduct offensive operations, and they often present easy targets. Furthermore, USFOR-A told the DoD OIG that attacks on checkpoints are a leading cause of ANDSF casualties.¹⁹⁶
- USFOR-A stated that it could not accurately estimate what percentage of ANDSF personnel were assigned to checkpoints. CSTC-A told the DoD OIG that the ANDSF had previously operated more than 10,000 known checkpoints across the country. The MoD and MoI, in compliance with an Afghan presidential decree to reduce and reinforce checkpoints, have developed plans to identify and mitigate the most vulnerable checkpoints, according to CSTC-A. According to CSTC-A, the ANDSF is in the process of identifying 400 of the most dangerous checkpoints so they can be removed or reinforced into more heavily fortified patrol bases if they have a high tactical value...CSTC-A has previously reported optimistic assessments to the DoD OIG of ANDSF efforts to reduce and reinforce checkpoints. For at least the last three quarters, CSTC-A has stated that “the ANDSF took steps” and “made great progress” toward this goal. However, Afghan government initiatives have struggled to achieve long-term gains since local Afghan officials want ANDSF checkpoints in their areas because they see checkpoints as evidence the government is providing security, according to CSTC-A.¹⁹⁷
- Previous Lead IG reporting raised questions about USFOR-A’s plans for the future of the ALP, the network of locally recruited security forces that were intended to provide security in Afghan villages and rural areas. This quarter, NSOCC-A confirmed plans to dissolve the ALP, which was staffed with about 18,000 members this quarter...¹⁹⁸
- NSOCC-A reported to the DoD OIG that U.S. support for the ALP through the ASFF will end on September 30. NSOCC-A reported that to mitigate potential security risks associated with dissolving the program, the Afghan government developed a tentative plan for post-dissolution employment options and recovery of ALP weapons and equipment. The provincial headquarters will be responsible for collecting weapons and equipment from demobilized ALP personnel and will consolidate equipment at the Regional Logistics Centers for further disposition. DoS officials reported that implementing this strategy will be challenging, as

ALP leadership has stated that they have limited ability to carry out the strategy and there is a lack of coordination with civilian public and private sector organizations that could help to find employment opportunities for former members of the ALP...¹⁹⁹

- The demobilization plan, to be led primarily by the MoI, will dissolve ALP units by district, according to their assessed effectiveness and an estimated level of risk, and will include severance pay, depending on final MoD and MoI input, as well as CSTC-A approval., (p.25)... The MoI tasked provincial governors with finding civil employment for ALP members ineligible for recruitment. CSTC-A reported that it is encouraging the Afghan government to devise an Afghan solution to this issue...²⁰⁰
- The DoD OIG notes that unemployment in Afghanistan is extremely high, and the COVID-19 outbreak has exacerbated economic stresses in the country. It is unclear what employment opportunities the Afghan government will be able to create for demobilized ALP members who are not absorbed into other ANDSF units. Previous Lead IG reporting raised questions about whether well-armed but newly unemployed ALP members would join the ranks of violent extremist groups or local power brokers, who have previously used ALP units as their own private militias. ²⁰¹
- USFOR-A did not provide additional details on how advisors assess ANA-TF effectiveness at the company level. At the ministerial level, the ANA-TF Coordination Cell continues to work toward creating more involvement from the Office of the National Security Council, which previously has not had a high level of involvement with the ANA-TF, according to CSTC-A...CSTC-A stated that the Office of the National Security Council is key in “identifying those districts deemed politically, socially, or economically important and providing the guidance and direction to the MoD in [the] employment of the ANA-TF.”²⁰²
- According to CSTC-A, the ANA failed to fully integrate the ANA-TF into its organizational hierarchy. USFOR-A reported that some among the ANA leadership do not consider the ANA-TF as a useful component of ANA operations... In addition, USFOR-A reported that some among the regular ANA forces believe that the ANA-TF, as an emerging unit, is somewhat “inferior.” Furthermore, some ANA regular commanders are confused with how to employ the ANA-TF, as well as how to equip them... According to CSTC-A, these perceptions have caused the ANA-TF to struggle with gaining full acceptance within the ANA...²⁰³
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- While Basic Warrior Training attendance and graduation rates remained relatively high, advanced specialty training school attendance remains low... The ANA currently has 11 schools divided among 4 specialty branches: Combat Arms Schools, Combat Support Schools, Combat Service Support Schools, and General Services Branch Schools. An MoD directive states that all ANA Basic Warrior Training graduates are supposed to go directly to advanced training for their specialty role in the army. However, the ANA Chief of General Staff contradicted the MoD directive in 2017 when he directed that all basic training graduates be assigned immediately to their units, which then decide whether the soldiers should attend advanced training...²⁰⁶
- Since 2017, the ANA has experienced low attendance rates at specialty schools and a commensurate low rate of soldiers proficient in their unique military occupational specialties... utilization rates at some ANA branch schools this quarter decreased while rates at others increased from last quarter. However, overall, attendance at specialty schools has increased since December 2018, when utilization rates at most ANA branch schools were below 25 percent...²⁰⁷

- CSTC-A told the DoD OIG that it continued to advise the ANA that better trained soldiers are more effective and less likely to desert or become casualties, and that CSTC-A works with TAAC advisors to encourage corps-level commands to release personnel to attend the notionally mandatory advanced training... CSTC-A also told the DoD OIG that the ANA Chief of General Staff ordered a much higher proportion (52 percent) of the Basic Warrior Training class that graduated on February 24 to attend advanced training, and the MoD Universal Training Education Directorate Command continues to push the ANA General Staff to increase attendance rates at advanced training...²⁰⁸
- This quarter, the ANA was short of meeting the current option year goal of a 70 percent work share of ground vehicle maintenance (see Table 2). The ANA performed 42 percent of tasks in January and increased to 53 percent in March. In the previous quarter, monthly performance ranged from 47 to 53 percent of tasks at maintenance sites. The ANP performed between 23 and 25 percent of its vehicle maintenance tasks per month, which was slightly higher than last quarter's workshare, between 21 and 24 percent, but on average slightly below the current option year goal of 25 percent.²⁰⁹

The Department of Defense 1225 Report for June 2020 avoids some of the criticism in the inspector general reports, but still provides important insights and does so by ministry and service. Nevertheless, the 1225 report has a striking lack of data on ANA and ANP effectiveness, and it implies that the Afghan National Air Force (ANAF) and the Afghan Special Missions Wing (SMW) have precision strike and IS&R capabilities capable of replacing U.S. and allied air strike capabilities – which they do not. It is a DoD document, but it makes no attempt to address the implications of the peace process and its success or failure. It fails to address many of the limits in the police force, and talks about their conversion from, paramilitary roles to conventional policing without any assessment of the conditions under which they will have to operate. It seems designed more to buy time than present the kind of reporting now needed.

The following excerpts have the page reference listed at the end of the excerpt. ²¹⁰

Ministry of Defense (MoD)

- Although the MoD continues to improve through the leadership of reliable partners, it remains challenged in conducting sustainment activities including maintenance, supply and procurement. The MAG-D will continue to TAA the MoD at the point of need and focus their efforts on processes to institutionalize the force. (p. 52)
- The MoD has current fiscal year total budget of approximately \$1 billion, of which approximately \$725 million is funded by ASFF. The MoD is capable of executing its procurement budget but has room for improvement. (p. 52)
- The (MoD) management plan struggles with proper slotting and placement of the appropriate rank structures into the right positions. Force modeling, continued review of the Personnel Manpower Plan, and more focused career management will better enable the implementation of a merit-based promotion system. (p. 53)
- The KMTC is the foundational military training pillar of the ANA Training and Education Landscape (ANA TEL) and serves as the MoD's primary facility for Basic Warfare Training (BWT) and advanced combat training, including branch-specific training...For this reporting period, KMTC continued to struggle with basic life support functions--including power, water and improvements to infrastructure--to provide quality conditions for ANA soldiers to train. KMTC witnessed a surge in the numbers and frequency of foundational courses; however, branch schools continue to run under capacity because not all recruits from BWT are assigned to advanced training. In addition, the Corps have difficulty in filling their allocated spaces and TAA efforts focused on Corps increasing their utilization rates. Due to external limiting factors, courses do not always finish within established times. The majority of course fill rates improved and are now higher than 90 percent.
- Regional Military Training Centers (RMTC) are decentralized training locations overseen by each Corps Commander...RMTCs suffer from a lack of equipment and inconsistent or substandard curriculum and trainer cadre. Each RMTC has unique operational, manning and leadership conditions. The RMTCs must

include a focus on sustainment and collective training to remain as a viable training location. Training advisors continued to advise the ANDSF on the need to centralize initial and advanced combat training at KMTC, and utilize RMTCs for only collective training. (p. 53)

- The provision of food, fuel, equipment, ammunition, and maintenance, is essential to ensuring the ANDSF can complete their missions. The MoD has the logistical capacity to support and supply the ANA, and maintains robust stockpiles of equipment. However, the MoD struggles at times to have accurate awareness of its inventory. The ANA continues to make incremental progress with their supply system. However, the ANA remain challenged with ground distribution of material. ANA distribution of supplies improved during this period with the AAF channel flight program providing supplies to ANA corps on a routine basis. (p. 54)
- ...The MoD has the logistical capacity to support and supply the ANA, and maintains robust stockpiles of equipment. However, the MoD struggles at times to have accurate awareness of its inventory. The ANA continues to make incremental progress with their supply system. However, the ANA remain challenged with ground distribution of material. ANA distribution of supplies
- A continuous lack of personnel present for work at the maintenance facilities and the ANDSF's inability to conduct logistics operations continue to hinder the successful attainment of the workshare split set forth by the National Maintenance Strategy contract. (p. 54)
- The MoD made significant improvement in operations centers and associated processes, which allowed Senior MoD leaders to make strategic decisions and provide timely operational guidance to commanders in the field. The MoD still has room for improvement with subordinates and TAA efforts must continue to focus on changing the culture to encourage leaders to allow their subordinates to take disciplined initiative and not wait for guidance before taking necessary actions. (p. 55)
- Although many echelons of the ANA are still lacking in overall education on ISR system capabilities, this increased emphasis and healthy competition to prove utilization and effectiveness has increased demand for ISR assets by ground commanders...Efforts are underway to use NIMS to develop a COP in the National Military Command Center (NMCC) and Corps-level Tactical Operations Centers (TOC). This broadened use of NIMS provides increased access to intelligence products and improved communication vertically and horizontally in the chain of command. (p. 56).
- The ANA and ANP continue to struggle to recruit, retain, and manage the career progression of women. (p. 56)

Afghan National Army (ANA)

- Attrition continues to degrade the force and outpace recruitment and retention. The primary driver of attrition is the large number of soldiers who are DFR for being absent without leave (AWOL) for more than thirty consecutive days. During the reporting period, MoD continued to implement APPS leading to greater accountability, which contributed to an increase in separations and retirements and reliable APPS data. Soldiers leaving the ANA at the end of the contracted service accounts for approximately a quarter of the monthly losses. Combat casualties account for a small percentage of monthly losses and reduced significantly for the reporting period compared to prior periods. (p. 58)

Afghan National Air Force (ANAF)

- The ANDSF is confident in the AAF capability and there is an insatiable desire for precision munitions where in some cases conventional munitions could be employed. Advisors continue to note that Afghan crews demonstrated consistent progress in target selection and collateral damage estimation and showed impressive restraint and ability to minimize civilian casualties. (p. 60)
- The AAF's ability to execute routine air operations and to identify and develop its future leaders without advisory support led to a shift from persistent to periodic advising during the reporting period at all echelons. 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. (p. 60)
- The AAF has 174 aircraft that DoD and other donor nation funding sustains, of which 149 are in-country and available or in short-term maintenance. Ten A-29s are in the United States in support of Afghan training

needs and five MD-530s should arrive in FY2021 to backfill combat losses. The remaining aircraft are in third countries for overhaul or heavy repair. (p. 61)

- In early 2020, the newly appointed Afghan GSG3-Air Director directed a revision of the tasking processes for aerial resupply missions. The subsequent improvements in the mission tasking system assisted the small AAF C-130 fleet to become more effective and efficient... There are currently nine Afghan maintenance personnel trained to work on C-130s. The AAF relies on DoD CLS for C-130H logistics and maintenance. Two of the four AAF C-130Hs are currently in depot maintenance outside Afghanistan. (pp. 62-63)
- Although the demand for C-208 airdrop has increased, risks associated with low-altitude daytime drops have limited mission success. The AAF is developing plans to qualify airdrop crews to conduct night airdrop using NVGs to address those risks. The AAF is also focused on improving the processes for requesting airdrops and further developing its organic aircrew training capability. (p. 64)
- C-208 AAF maintenance capability is improving. There are 18 level-1 maintainers (four Avionic level-1s are still required); 24 level-2s (three Engine Body and nine Avionics level-2s are still required); and 30 level-3s. (p. 65)
- The AC-208 Eliminator aircraft has provided ISR and strike capabilities in support of ANDSF ground and air operations since it was first fielded to the AAF in February 2019 following completion of training in the United States of the first crews. The AC-208 has a C-208 airframe but is equipped with a more powerful engine. The AC-208's primary capability is to employ precision-guided munitions, in particular the Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS) modification to the 2.75-inch Hydra rocket. It also is equipped with the MX-15 sensor, which is the most capable in the AAF. The MX-15, along with the APKWS, allows the AC-208 to be an extremely capable armed-ISR platform. The AC-208 also can "buddy lase," or guide a laser-guided bomb from an A-29, for partnered A-29 missions. Since inception a year ago, ASFF-funded training efforts have produced 13 out of the 15 aircrews necessary for full operational AAF independence. (p. 64)
- The AAF A-29 crew has been focusing on single-seat sensor operations with the acquisition of new software. This will eliminate the need for dual cockpit operations allowing for a more realistic attainment of current crew ratios. (pp.65-66)
- AAF maintainers can perform the majority of Mi-17 routine maintenance but have no ability to perform overhauls, which are required every 2,000 flight hours at a cost of about \$6 million. (p. 67)
- The AAF's MD-530s continues to rely on a DoD CLS maintenance as TAAC-A continues to work with the AAF to increase the number of MD-530 maintenance students in training to improve organic maintenance capacity. The AAF will continue to require CLS and supporting training contracts to maintain combat capability in the mid-term and long-term. Although the AAF previously planned to build MD-530 night combat capability with the inclusion of NVG training in early 2019, this effort never formally progressed because the AAF instead focused on developing AC-208 night capabilities. (p. 68)
- As the AAF begins to develop their initial cadre of instructor (two instructor pilots with two more currently in upgrade training) and evaluator pilots, through contractor-led training courses, they will gain the ability to organically train and certify UH-60 aircraft commanders. The aircraft commander qualification is based on ability and experience not time. The AAF will utilize mission and training flight experience and local in-squadron training to achieve this goal. UH-60 AAF maintenance capability is progressing, and the first 55 Aircraft Maintenance Training (AMT) and AMDC students graduated in March. In order to be fully capable the AAF requires 57 level-1, 143 level-2, and 86 level-3 UH-60 maintainers. (p. 69)
- The AAF relies largely on CLS to ensure the sustainability of its fleet and will remain so for several years. With the exception of the Mi-17, for which the AAF conducts nearly 95 percent of flight line maintenance, CLS remains critical to platform sustainment; the AAF and SMW are, for example, completely reliant on CLS for parts supply and for engineering and technical support. (p. 70)

MoD Afghan Special Security Forces

- ANASOC growth is meeting planned milestones, contributing to increased combat availability and force utilization. This increased OPTEMPO has directly impacted the ORC and integrity of ANASOC units.

ANASOC endures, at times, a lack of consistent training and understanding of tactics, techniques, and procedures. ANASOC leadership has worked with MoD to reverse this trend over the last several months. (p. 73)

- The AAF relies largely on CLS to ensure the sustainability of its fleet and will remain so for several years. With the exception of the Mi-17, for which the AAF conducts nearly 95 percent of flight line maintenance, CLS remains critical to platform sustainment; the AAF and SMW are, for example, completely reliant on CLS for parts supply and for engineering and technical (p. 72)
- **The National Mission brigade** provides the President of Afghanistan and the MoD with rapidly deployable special operations force capability to conduct short-notice, nation-wide direct action, hostage rescue, special reconnaissance, and COIN tasks... The Special Mission Wing (SMW) and the Afghan Air Force (AAF) provide priority ISR over-watch and strike support to the NMB. During this fighting season, the NMB has 50 percent of their assigned strength on duty. The NMB maintains an offensive posture and high operational tempo (OPTEMPO) to exert pressure on the Taliban and other terrorist threats. As a result, the NMB has a dysfunctional Operational Readiness Cycle (ORC). Notwithstanding, it has managed to generate prepared force packages when and where required. (pp. 72-73)
- High demand for maneuver strike capabilities affects ANASOC's ability to place remaining MSKs into the CSMC. Once all MSKs are converted into CSKs, ANASOC will transition the CSMC to a platform for currency training. This transition was scheduled to occur by the fall of 2020. However, training restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and other current events mean the date of transition has been delayed. ANASOC and NSOCC-A Advisors are working to identify a new schedule. (p. 74)
- Sustainment is a critical issue underwriting ANASOC's capability. Without a capable sustainment system, the ORC of ANASOC units is undermined reducing unit operational capability. . In cases where the ANASOC deploys beyond that timeframe, units rely on logistical support from the ANA corps and MoD for rations, OCIE, and ammunition. This logistical dependency upon the ANA corps subjects the ANASOC to ANA competing priorities, long logistics trains, and inconsistent ANA corps support. This compounds the effects of misuse. During this reporting period, efforts were made to address this problem by adding sustainment positions to the ANASOC Tashkil to improve logistic capability gaps and self-sufficiency. (p. 75)
- **Special Mission Wing (SMW):** The SMW is the Afghan Special Security Force's (ASSF) aviation unit. It conducts special operations aviation missions that require precision, skills, complex coordination, and capabilities not found in the conventional Afghan Air Force (AAF)... Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, force generation, training pipelines, and operational support functions have been paused until face-to-face TAA restrictions are lifted. Despite these pauses, the SMW has developed COVID-19 CASEVAC TTPs and implemented aircraft and personnel decontamination procedures. An Afghan-independent flight operations center was created and co-located with Special Operations Advisory Team – Central (SOAT-C) in Kabul to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 while increasing the Afghan scope of control and responsibility. Operationally, the SMW has increased its HAF operational integration with the AAF. (p. 76)
- The most prevalent misuse involves CASEVAC, personnel movements, and resupply general support missions. In this reporting period, misuse of the SMW has remained consistent with previous reporting period levels. These missions often fall into one of three categories: 1) general support for ASSF units (SMW supports the appropriate dependency but performs an inappropriate mission); 2) general support missions for non-ASSF units (inappropriate dependency and inappropriate mission); and 3) gross misuse (utilizing SMW assets for missions that would not qualify as general support). Gross misuse makes up less than 1 percent of SMW missions. (p. 77)
- SMW's proficiency in sustaining its Mi-17 fleet regressed during this reporting period. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, approximately 65 percent of overall Mi-17 maintenance and 90 percent of scheduled maintenance (routine maintenance based on the hours flown), was conducted by Afghan SMW personnel. (p. 79)
- The Tashkil (authorized manning) currently provides sufficient maintainer billets, but initiatives to produce fully trained personnel to fill the positions have only been marginally successful. As a result, the SMW has reserved additional designated training slots in the AAF maintenance training pipeline for their personnel.

UH-60 and CH-47 maintenance will be 100 percent CLS until organic SMW maintainers are able to begin filling those roles. (p. 80)

Ministry of the Interior

- The MoI lacks a refined human resource and career management capability. The MoI continues to struggle with an inadequate promotion process and an ambiguous career path structure. A functional performance appraisal system to support the promotion process does not exist. (p. 82)
- The MoI subsequently continued planning for transition from a paramilitary security force to a more traditional police force that focuses on “community policing” and rule of law. Included in these efforts is the reduction of the most dangerous checkpoints and re-evaluation of the training pipeline and training curriculum. Specifically, the MoI reviewed the curriculum of initial entry police training for officers and patrolmen to and revised it to reflect a civil law enforcement and community policing emphasis. (p. 81)
- The MoI also underwent efforts to improve public perceptions and expectations of police officers. Several anti-corruption efforts were launched in the MoI during this reporting period to reduce corruption at checkpoints and prosecute personnel through the efforts of the Major Crimes Task Force. RS advisory efforts focused on ensuring the MoI and Afghan National Police are institutionally viable and prepared to implement this transition when the security and political environment allows. The security environment during the reporting period did not allow the MoI to transition from its focus as a paramilitary security focus to a force focused on “community policing.” (p. 82)
- During this reporting period, the First Deputy Minister replaced the Deputy Minister for Security several Provincial Chiefs of Police were replaced in an effort to improve effectiveness of the force. (p. 82)
- The MoI assesses that headquarters organizations are bloated while operational units have insufficient personnel, and is working to optimize its structure through the *Tashkil* review process. Consequently, the MoI has a goal of 30 percent reduction of its headquarters personnel and plans to move these positions and personnel to operational police departments. The process of civilianization has stalled due to competing demands (operations, elections, and counter-corruption). The last successful civilianization efforts occurred in the MoI’s finance and procurement sections. (p. 83)
- The MoI lacks an institutional training arena that reinforces community policing and lacks training to create a professional cadre of police. Initiatives like the MoD’s UTEDC are notably absent within the MoI and, furthermore, the MoI lacks human resource expertise and career management. Over time, the Coalition has refocused efforts away from combat training for the ANP and towards community policing... Beyond early training, the ANP still lacks an institutionalized leadership development program at the district and local level. Furthermore, mid-level ANP leaders lack leadership development opportunities. (p. 83)
- Similar to last reporting period, the MoI maintains a robust amount of supplies, but struggles to execute distribution processes. (p. 83)
- Supply and distribution planning and management is not well understood below the strategic level. This is further impeded by low levels of education and literacy at the operational and tactical levels. Items are not well tracked and visibility of items required is not readily available throughout the supply chain. The ANP’s lack of supply chain management and poor coordination and distribution of parts have direct impacts on equipment maintenance and the ANP’s ability to supply and sustain its forces properly. (p. 84)
- Cooperation among the various intelligence stakeholders within the MoI has increased over time, but intelligence integration in operations requires more work. The operational design has driven some MoI progress towards intelligence integration, especially through the security meetings, which provide a forum for the MoI to share its organic intelligence and integrate intelligence from other security pillars. (p. 85)

Afghan National Police

- Although ANP work with and alongside the ANA to fight the insurgency, the ANP lack training and are not equipped for traditional counterinsurgency tactics. The ANP’s focus on and employment in counterinsurgency military functions have hindered the development of anti-crime and other community policing capabilities, and the ANP are several years behind the ANA in terms of development....The desired ANP end-state is a professional and effective police force focused on community- centric, traditional,

evidenced-based law enforcement policing. Milestones include determining the proper operating model and force distribution to police Afghanistan effectively, redefine ANP roles and responsibilities, assign ANP pillar responsibilities, and establish training standards and work ethics to facilitate effective policing. (p. 87)

- Leadership across Afghan Uniformed Police units varies, but generally senior MoI and AUP leaders do not empower lower-level leaders to make decisions. Moreover, local AUP units and leaders are susceptible to influence by local power brokers and government officials. (p. 88)

Afghan Local Police (ALP)

- The ALP provide security within villages and rural areas to protect the population from insurgent attacks and to protect facilities. NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A) provides TAA support to the ALP at the ALP Staff Directorate (SD) level. ALP personnel are not included in the overall ANDSF authorization, and the United States funds the salaries for the ALP. The President of Afghanistan is expected to sign a decree to initiate the process of nationwide dissolution of the ALP. Once that decree is signed, MoI will initiate the dissolution, which includes transferring or recruiting some of the ALP into other ANDSF and the dismissal of others from service. This effort will culminate at the end of FY 2020 when funding for the program ceases. (p.88)

MOI Afghan Special Security Forces – General Command of Police Special Units

- The Ministry of Interior (MoI) General Command of Police Special Units (GCPSU) commands and controls Police Special Units established and authorized by the Afghan Government to conduct high-risk counter-terrorism (CT), counter-narcotics (CN), and counter-organized crime (COC) missions... NMUs have a mandate to operate across Afghanistan to conduct a range of policing functions from CT to high risk arrests (HRA) and hostage recovery (HRO) and also possess surveillance and reconnaissance teams (SRT). NMUs are geographically located to provide security to regions and cities assessed to be vital to national stability. They have the ability to conduct missions unilaterally and in support of joint ANDSF operations. NMUs often train personnel, plan and execute operations independently but rely on coalition enablers such as intelligence, air, and fire support... Kabul warrants the highest degree of National-Strategic focus, thereby translating to the priority resourcing of Crisis Response Unit (CRU)-222 and Counterterrorism Force (CF)-333 with an emphasis on HRA and crisis response. (p. 90)
- GCPSU achieved set ASSF personnel growth milestones during this reporting period and remains the MoI's preeminent police component. Unlike some elements of the ASSF, the GCPSU does not endure high levels of misuse. Coalition advisors noted minimal misuse and high operational readiness rates of GCPSU. The quality of the GCPSU training pipeline enabled the growth and professionalism of the NMUs as GCPSU does not struggle to fill training courses. The NMUs remain the first choice ASSF unit for crisis response in urban areas across Afghanistan and the only option for HPA response within the Kabul metropolitan area. During this reporting period, GCPSU OPTEMPO was reduced due to the Reduction in Violence (RiV), followed by COVID-19 restrictions within Kabul. Despite these operational limitations, GCPSU still prosecuted targets and responded to multiple HPAs in Kabul including the Mazari Day gathering, a religious observance at the Sikh Temple, and the Presidential Inauguration. (p. 91)
- The total number of NMUs has increased by 50 percent since the fall of 2018. As a result, the highly trained and experienced officers at the mid- to senior-level have been dispersed into leadership roles across the breadth of the expanded force. Consequently, junior officers have been appointed to higher duties such as squadron command on an accelerated timeline. Without the benefit of experience attained through time in rank these younger officers require more intensive mentoring from NSOCC-A Advisors. Compounding this issue, the MoI has also transferred many of the most experienced and capable mid-level officers to serve as PCoPs. This has achieved mixed results. Although often effective as PCoPs, they have demonstrated a willingness to reach back to the NMU to conduct tasks that overuse or misuse the GCPSU, undermining the NMU's operational effectiveness. (p. 92)
- The prestigious nature and reliability of the GCPSU itself contributes to the occasional misuse of its units. When another ministry, provincial governor, or ANA Corps commander requests support, the MOI will often dispatch an NMU squadron in response. (p.92)

It is clear from all three reports that the Afghan forces are not ready to stand on their own, particularly at the police and local levels. What is not clear is whether the reforms of the Ministries is reducing corruption and incompetence, how many ANA units are actually effective, what role U.S. elite forces and train and assist personnel played in recent fighting, what the level of morale is in Afghan forces, and how they will view any actual peace plan and implementation. As the ARVN in Vietnam showed as well as the Iraqi forces that initially faced ISIS and its subsequent collapse also has shown, maintaining effective forces in a peace process or supposed state of peace can be far more difficult for new armies than official estimates and promises of reform indicate especially before they are actually tested by events.

Chart Eighteen: The Afghan National Security Forces at the End of June 2020 – Part One

Afghan National Army

The ANA General Staff (GS) commands and controls all of Afghanistan's ground and air forces, including the ANA conventional forces, the AAF, the SMW, the ANA Special Operations Command (ANASOC), the Afghan National Civil Order Force (ANCOF), and the Afghan Border Force (ABF). In total, the ANA consists of 27 combat brigades, 3 combat air wings, 4 branch and basic training schools, 6 ANCOF brigades, 7 ABF brigades, and additional support facilities (e.g., depots and hospitals).

Afghan National Army Strength: There are 178,815 MoD personnel slotted in APPS and eligible for pay. CSTC-A reported that from November 1, 2019, to April 30, 2020, the ANA, Afghan Air Force (AAF), and ANA Special Operations Corps (ANASOC) slotted or cleansed 3,457 promotions, 34,805 reassignments, 13,365 initial assignments, and 20,055 separations in APPS. Attrition continues to degrade the force and outpace recruitment and retention. The primary driver of attrition is the large number of soldiers who are DFR for being absent without leave (AWOL) for more than thirty consecutive days. During the reporting period, MoD continued to implement APPS leading to greater accountability, which contributed to an increase in separations and retirements and reliable APPS data. Soldiers leaving the ANA at the end of the contracted service accounts for approximately a quarter of the monthly losses. Combat casualties account for a small percentage of monthly losses and reduced significantly for the reporting period compared to prior periods.

Afghan National Army Structure: The largest ANA elements are the six regional corps. Each corps is typically composed of a headquarters Kandak, three to four infantry brigades, and various specialty Kandaks. The 201st Corps, 203rd Corps, 205th Corps, 207th Corps, 209th Corps, 215th Corps, and 217th Corps are responsible for their geographic regions that follow the provincial boundaries. The ANDSF divided the 209th's previous sector to incorporate the 217th Corps. The 111th Capital Division is independent from any corps and is responsible for security in Kabul.

ANA Territorial Force (ANA-TF)

The ANA-TF is comprised of locally recruited ANA units intended to serve as a "hold force" in permissive security environments. ANA-TF units exist only where political alignment is achieved, thereby bringing provincial, district, and local leadership into agreement. This accountability serves two purposes: to ensure that local forces are tied to the central government with adequate discipline and oversight; and to assure that the central government is adequately supporting the units with training, supplies, and reinforcements. The three pillars of accountability are the elders of the community, government representatives, and the ANA corps commander. The key purpose of the ANA-TF is to provide political space to GIROA within strategic districts through effective local security measures. Essentially, the ANA-TF's provision of security enables GIROA to overmatch insurgent abilities to provide ad-hoc government structures. The ONSC is integral in identifying the districts that are considered politically, socially, or economically important, and providing the guidance and direction to the MoD on the use of the ANA-TF.

There are 105 authorized companies, of which 83 are operational, six are provisional, seven are in training, and nine are planned. The ANA-TF have largely struggled to gain full integration and acceptance from the ANA. Many among the ANA leadership view the ANA-TF as a "sixth finger" and therefore fail to fully integrate the ANA-TF into the organic organizational hierarchy. The rare exception is in ANA 201st Corps, which has largely embraced the ANA-TF, and the program in eastern Afghanistan has thrived under the Corps Commanders' leadership. As the program grows, the ANA -- due in large part to emphasis from MoD leadership -- is beginning to demonstrate increased integration and acceptance of the program. The recent reassignment of several ANA Corps commanders has led to improved utilization and integration of the ANA-TF into current operations.

Chart Eighteen: The Afghan National Security Forces at the End of June 2020 – Part Two

Afghan Border Force

The Afghan Border Force (ABF) consists of six brigades under the operational control of the ANA Corps. Each Corps maintains command and control (C2) over one ABF brigade in its geographic location (the 209th Corps maintains C2 over two ABF brigades). The ABF maintains security in the border security zone, which extends 30 miles into the territory of Afghanistan, to deter terrorists, criminal groups, and smugglers. The ABF also supports ANA operations against insurgents and terrorists.

Afghan National Civil Order Force

The Afghan National Civil Order Force (ANCOF) consists of seven brigades under the operational control of the ANA Corps. ANCOF missions include dealing with civil unrest, reacting to insurgent activities in remote and high-threat areas, conducting civil order presence patrols, and providing crisis response to public unrest and terrorist attacks in urban and metropolitan areas. The ANCOF support clearing operations by providing intelligence, tactical support, and manpower to secure seized terrain. The ANDSF plans to absorb the ANCOF force structure into the ANA over the next two years. The dissolution begins with the 203rd and 215th ANCOF formations. Subsequent ANCOF formation dissolution is being planned with those former ANCOF personnel filling empty Tashkil positions within their respective corps.

Afghan Air Force

The AAF is comprised of three flight wings and 18 detachments that provide aerial fires and lift support to ground and special operations forces. The AAF continues to show steady improvement in pilot skill, ground crew proficiency, and air-to-ground integration (AGI). The AAF can independently plan and provide air assets for logistics, resupply, humanitarian relief efforts, return of human remains, MEDEVAC, casualty evacuation (CASEVAC), traditional ISR, air interdiction, close air attack, armed overwatch, and aerial escort missions. During this reporting period, the AAF increased synchronization, integration and operations with the Afghan Special Security Forces.

The AAF has 174 aircraft that DoD and other donor nation funding sustains, of which 149 are in-country and available or in short-term maintenance. Ten A-29s are in the United States in support of Afghan training needs and five MD-530s should arrive in FY2021 to backfill combat losses. The remaining aircraft are in third countries for overhaul or heavy repair. The AAF fleet that DoD has procured include C-208, AC-208, C-130, and A-29 fixed-wing aircraft, and MD-530, Mi-17, and UH-60A+ helicopters.

Commander, AAF has highlighted Afghan Maintenance as one of his primary concerns that is impeding their overall sustainment efforts. He has identified three primary challenges facing the AAF maintenance enterprise: 1) accountability, 2) standardized procedures, and 3) leadership. COM AAF has instituted a Procedure Improvement Plan (PIP) with the assistance of TAAC-Air advisors to build procedures, accountability, and leadership into the AAF maintenance enterprise. Building sustainability into this enterprise will take several months, but is a high interest item for TAAC-Air and the AAF. (p. 70)

Afghan National Army Special Operations Command (ANASOC)

The Afghan National Army Special Operations Command (ANASOC) is a corps-level component of the Afghan National Army (ANA). ANASOC conducts precision short-duration, military special operations beyond the range, scope and capability of conventional ANA units across Afghanistan. Consequently, when properly resourced and employed, it sits at the forefront of ANA capability in securing national sovereignty and countering terrorist groups seeking to exploit under-governed and ill-governed spaces within Afghanistan. Positioned at key locations across the country, ANASOC units are the Ministry of Defense (MoD) arm of a cross-security pillar apparatus responsible for the upstream disruption of, and reaction to, a range of violent terrorist and insurgent actors. ANASOC Liaison Officers embedded within the CSAR and RTTs coordinate future operations planning and deliberate targeting efforts with other Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) elements and Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) pillars to support these disruption and response efforts.

Chart Eighteen: The Afghan National Security Forces at the End of June 2020 – Part Three

ANASOC consists of four Special Operations Brigades (SOB) and a National Mission Brigade (NMB). Ten battalion-sized ANA Commando Special Operations Kandaks (SOK), six Mobile Strike Kandaks (MSKs), two Cobra Strike Kandaks (CSKs), and seven support elements are spread across the corps. The MSKs and CSKs are equipped with three variants of the Mobile Strike Force Vehicle (MSFV), a vehicle based on the U.S. M1117 Armored Security Vehicle (ASV). MSFVs are armored, mine-resistant, four-wheeled fighting vehicles equipped with a variety of heavy weapons that provide a mounted combat mobility capability.

The MSKs were previously trained in conventional mounted infantry tactics and assigned to the ANA Corps. In early 2017, the MSKs were reassigned to ANASOC to begin transition into CSKs. MSK personnel are required to attend the Commando Qualification Course (CDOQC) followed by the Cobra Strike Maneuver Course (CSMC) to successfully complete the conversion process into CSKs and ensure proper integration into ANASOC. This conversion process began in August 2017. To date, only two MSKs have completed conversion training.

Special Operations Kandaks (SOK)

The primary ANASOC tactical force element is the SOK. SOKs conduct special operations tasks against insurgent networks to support regional ANA Corps' counter-insurgency (COIN) operations. They provide a response capability against terrorist and insurgent threats and can forward-deploy mission command packages in support of planned offensive and contingency operations. All 10 SOKs, both CSKs, and the six MSKs support regional special operations brigades (SOBs) and have the ability to complement the ANA Corps' conventional response, using ciphers to guide complementary actions. The 6th SOK, assigned to the NMB and located in the Kabul area, functions as the ANA's National Mission Unit.

MSK and CSK: MSKs and CSKs utilize combined arms maneuver providing a rapidly deployable strike capability delivering mobile precision lethality and the ability to quickly respond to emerging crises. MSKs were originally designed to provide the ANA with a quick reaction force capability optimized for daylight hours. The CSKs address a capability gap associated with MSKs by employing a combination of mounted and dismounted combat maneuver tactics to conduct patrols and engage in urban warfare. CSKs can also operate at night with sophisticated night vision equipment mounted on their MSFVs to enhance combat effectiveness. The CSK capability enhances ANASOC's firepower, mobility, survivability, and lethality on the battlefield.

National Mission Brigade: The NMB provides the President of Afghanistan and the MoD with rapidly deployable special operations force capability to conduct short-notice, nation-wide direct action, hostage rescue, special reconnaissance, and COIN tasks. The NMB has a deployable mission-command package, including the 6th SOK, Ktah Khas (KKA), and two Special Forces (SF) Kandaks. The NMB routinely integrates a range of ANDSF Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities into its mission profiles. Within the ANA, this ability to plan, coordinate, and integrate a range of tactical enablers into tactical operations is unique. Ministry of Interior (MoI) and National Directorate of Security (NDS) Liaison Officers serve in the NMB Headquarters (HQ) to coordinate resourcing of special operations missions between the ANA and Afghan National Police (ANP). The Special Mission Wing (SMW) and the Afghan Air Force (AAF) provide priority ISR over-watch and strike support to the NMB. During this fighting season, the NMB has 50 percent of their assigned strength on duty. The NMB maintains an offensive posture and high operational tempo (OPTEMPO) to exert pressure on the Taliban and other terrorist threats. As a result, the NMB has a dysfunctional Operational Readiness Cycle (ORC). Notwithstanding, it has managed to generate prepared force packages when and where required.

Special Forces Kandaks (SFK): SFKs are the ANASOC's premier small team special operations capability. SFKs engage with security personnel across the ANDSF and the civilian population. SFK units also maintain regional expertise to support SOBs and can operate anywhere within the nation supporting mission requirements directed by the MoD.

Chart Eighteen: The Afghan National Security Forces at the End of June 2020 – Part Four

Ktah Khas (KKA): The KKA is a light infantry special operations Kandak assigned to ANASOC's NMB. The KKA is comprised of eight companies that remain nearly at full strength: three operational companies, a training company, an engineer company, a military intelligence company, a support company, and a headquarters company. These additional companies support the KKA training cycle and operations, including transportation for the KKA strike forces, explosive ordnance disposal to conduct counter-IED (C-IED) operations, and the supporting female tactical platoon, which enables interactions with women and children on missions. KKA platoons and companies conduct intelligence-led direct-action assaults against high-value individuals. The KKA is also able to conduct vehicle interdictions utilizing ground and air mobility platforms. KKAs are not subject to the same misuse as the rest of the ASSF forces.

General Support Kandaks (GSK): GSKs conduct emergency resupply and facilitate delivery of special operations forces (SOF)- specific equipment and supplies to ANASOC units based within Kabul. ANASOC's suite of capabilities expands government options beyond those offered by the conventional ANA, supporting the government's ability to neutralize a threat early before local forces are overwhelmed, reinforce ANA conventional force success, and rapidly reinforce the defense of key terrain, including provincial and district centers.

Special Mission Wing (SMW)

The Special Mission Wing (SMW) is the Afghan Special Security Force's (ASSF) aviation unit. It conducts special operations aviation missions that require precision, skills, complex coordination, and capabilities not found in the conventional Afghan Air Force (AAF). SMW is the only night-capable rotary wing assault unit capable of conducting multi-ship HAF support for the ASSF. The SMW also provides precision airborne ISR through its PC-12 fixed wing platform.

SMW's structure consists of four rotary wing Mi-17 assault squadrons and one fixed wing PC-12 ISR squadron capable of conducting independent missions in support of ASSF elements. Two rotary-wing assault squadrons are based in Kabul with the other two located at Kandahar Air Field (KAF) and Mazar-e Sharif (MeS). The PC-12 squadron is headquartered in Kabul with smaller detachments operating out of KAF and MeS. The PC-12 ISR squadron provides ASSF with operational reach across the country while integrating with the AAF to provide real-time intelligence to its A-29 light attack aircraft. This structure remains unchanged from the previous reporting period.

The NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A): The SMW Special Operations Advisory Group (SOAG) maintains a Train, Advise, Assist (TAA) relationship focused on facilitating the proper employment of the SMW. As a result, the SOAG assists with screening the validity of ciphers (formally tasked missions), concurs with the utilization of the SMW for various missions, and augments the level of Coalition support depending on type of mission (unilateral versus bilateral).

Ministry of the Interior

Afghan National Police Strength

The MoI currently has slotted 99,000 ANP and 18,000 ALP personnel in APPS as of March 29, 2020. Separately, the ANP and ALP processed 1,782 promotions, 11,375 reassignments, 7,052 initial assignments, and 202 separations in APPS. As with the ANA, the number of ANP personnel dropped from the rolls continues to comprise the largest portion of overall ANP attrition. 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.

The ANP is composed of four pillars (AUP, PSP, ABP, and AACP) and three sub-pillars (ALP, APPF, and CNPA). The GCPSU is the MoI's component of the ASSF. The ALP and the APPF do not count as part of the 124,388 authorized levels; however, they provide additional security under the MoI. A significant share of ANP personnel costs is paid by international donors through the United Nations Development Programmer's Multidonor Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA). The United States had been, but is no longer, the largest contributor to LOTFA. The ALP receive funding from ASFF, while the APPF do not.

Chart Eighteen: The Afghan National Security Forces at the End of June 2020 – Part Five

Afghan Uniform Police: The AUP is the largest police agency in Afghanistan and the primary police force the local populace encounters in their daily lives. The AUP consists of the traffic police, fire and rescue departments, and a Provincial Police Headquarters (PHQ) in each of the 34 provinces.

The AUP mission is to maintain the rule of law, provide security and civil order, prevent cultivation and smuggling of narcotics, and prevent the smuggling of weapons and other public property, such as historical and cultural relics. Other AUP duties include the detention of criminal suspects to be handed over to the judicial system, maintenance of reliable security measures for key infrastructure including roads and facilities, intelligence collection, and the provision of firefighting and rescue services during natural or man-made disasters. Leadership across AUP units varies, but generally senior MoI and AUP leaders do not empower lower-level leaders to make decisions. Moreover, local AUP units and leaders are susceptible to influence by local power brokers and government officials.

Afghan Local Police (ALP): The ALP provide security within villages and rural areas to protect the population from insurgent attacks and to protect facilities. NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A) provides TAA support to the ALP at the ALP Staff Directorate (SD) level. ALP personnel are not included in the overall ANDSF authorization, and the United States funds the salaries for the ALP. The President of Afghanistan is expected to sign a decree to initiate the process of nationwide dissolution of the ALP. Once that decree is signed, MoI will initiate the dissolution, which includes transferring or recruiting some of the ALP into other ANDSF and the dismissal of others from service. This effort will culminate at the end of FY 2020 when funding for the program ceases.

Public Security Police (PSP): The PSP provide urban and metropolitan security, including anti-riot security, for major gatherings and can act as a medium-level response force for situations that exceed the capabilities of the regular uniformed police. The PSP consist of seven reserve support battalions subordinate to the PSP directorate in Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, and Kunduz. As a marked success for the MoI, five of the seven planned PSP Kandaks are at FOC, with the remaining two at IOC. The MoI recognizes that these units need to be equipped and employed properly, demonstrating emerging progress towards a community-policing model based around public security.

Afghan Border Police (ABP): The ABP secure and safeguard national borders and provide security at Afghanistan's international airports to deter terrorists, criminal groups, and smugglers. The ABP HQ is located in Kabul.

Afghan Anti-Crime Police (AACP): The AACP provide specialist police expertise and counterterrorism, anti-corruption, criminal investigation, biometrics, forensics, and specialized security detail support. Coalition subject matter experts work alongside their Afghan counterparts in the AACP's forensic and biometric

Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA)

The CNPA is the lead ANDSF pillar for counter-narcotics efforts with regular narcotics police and specialized units located in all 34 provinces. Specialized units include the Sensitive Investigation Unit (SIU), the National Interdiction Unit (NIU), and the Intelligence Investigation Unit. The MoI's NIU and SIU conduct interdiction operations that target senior narcotics traffickers. NSOCC-A supports the NIU for joint CN and CT operations, training, and sustainment. These advisors coordinate with other U.S. Government departments and agencies, including the Department of State and the Drug Enforcement Agency.

MoI Afghan Special Security Forces

General Command of Police Special Units (GCPSU): The Ministry of Interior (MoI) General Command of Police Special Units (GCPSU) commands and controls Police Special Units established and authorized by the Afghan Government to conduct high-risk counter-terrorism (CT), counter-narcotics (CN), and counter-organized crime (COC) missions. GCPSU provides advice to the National Security Council (NSC)/National Security Adviser (NSA) through the Deputy Minister of Security (DM SEC), the MoI, and other commanders/organizations on the proper employment of special police capabilities. GCPSU's special policing functions include warrant-based high-risk arrests (HRAs), hostage recovery operations (HROs), crisis response (e.g. HPAs and complex attacks), and time-sensitive operations that require precision, increased skill, and unique capabilities not suited to the conventional Afghan National Police

Chart Eighteen: The Afghan National Security Forces at the End of June 2020 – Part Six

(ANP) and Counter Narcotics Police-Afghanistan (CNP- A). A key element of GCPSU operations is the collection of evidence to support the prosecution of suspects. GCPSU is a high-demand, low-density MoI law enforcement capability with military like structures and capabilities that result from the nature of Afghanistan's internal security situation. Like the MoD and NDS, the MoI assigns LNOs to the CSAR and RTTs to support deliberate targeting, operations, and crisis response across the country. The LNOs utilize the CRG to coordinate and facilitate GCPSU operations to support the CSAR and RTTs as required. GCPSU's

warrant-based targeting is intended to reinforce the importance and primacy of the rule of law, and counters terrorist groups exploiting Afghanistan as a safe haven to potentially launch external operations against our homelands.

GCPSU is composed of a HQ responsible for Command and Control (C2) of six National Mission Units (NMUs), 33 Provincial Police Special Units (PSUs), and 25 Intelligence Detachments. GCPSU is specifically designated to respond to emerging crises and terrorist threats across Afghanistan.

NMUs have a mandate to operate across Afghanistan to conduct a range of policing functions from CT to high risk arrests (HRA) and hostage recovery (HRO) and also possess surveillance and reconnaissance teams (SRT). NMUs are geographically located to provide security to regions and cities assessed to be vital to national stability. They have the ability to conduct missions unilaterally and in support of joint ANDSF operations. NMUs often train personnel, plan and execute operations independently but rely on coalition enablers such as intelligence, air, and fire support.

Kabul warrants the highest degree of National-Strategic focus, thereby translating to the priority resourcing of Crisis Response Unit (CRU)-222 and Counterterrorism Force (CF)-333 with an emphasis on HRA and crisis response.

A Provincial PSU is a quick reaction capability and special investigative element within a province and holds broad responsibilities for HRAs, evidence-based policing operations, and other policing functions not suited to the conventional ANP, within the rule of law construct. PSUs directly support the provincial chief of police (PCoP) in their assigned province, but remain under operational control of the GCPSU HQ. The GCPSU HQ maintains responsibility for the provision of manpower, training, and equipment of the PSUs, while the PCoP sustains the units through provisions of ammunition, food, pay, and other material. The PSUs consist of three Special Response Teams (SRT) and an intelligence detachment that provides localized human intelligence. There are only 33 PSUs but 34 Provinces in Afghanistan due to the Kabul NMU, CRU-222, covering PSU duties for Kabul, as Kabul is a densely populated city.

Intelligence Detachments provide a proactive investigation and surveillance capability, with a focus on CT and criminal networks that seek to destabilize GIRA. They are also used in developing actionable intelligence on warranted targets. The PSU Intelligence Detachments primarily use HUMINT to conduct evidence-based operations. Intelligence Detachments are now integral to each PSU, NMU, and RTT, providing tactical level intelligence. They conduct operations under the PCoP but report directly to the Head J2 and GCPSU Deputy Commander in Kabul, often acting on targets identified by GCPSU HQ.

MoI liaison officers embedded within the CSAR and RTTs coordinate future operations planning and deliberate targeting efforts with other ASSF elements and ANDSF pillars. During this reporting period, GCPSU's ability to conduct crisis response was aided greatly by the realignment of NSOCC-A/SOJTF-A TAA to support regional level contingencies.

Source: Excerpted by the author from *Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan*, Report to Congress in Accordance with Section 1225 of the National Defense Authorization Act, June 2020, pp. 57-93.

Progress in a Limited Afghan Air Force/IS&R Force

There are critical problems in all three of the major elements of Afghan security forces: in land combat forces, in police and local security forces, and in air combat units. The two most critical set of problems occur in the police and local security forces, and in the air combat units. It is unclear that Afghanistan's central government can really address the police and local security forces until it can either determine what kind of peace it can negotiate or that peace negotiations will fail. There are simply too many possibilities to plan for.

Developing such capabilities – either in terms of the ANAF or the ability to surge in U.S. and allied forces if a peace fails, is a different story. The critical role that U.S. and allied airpower have played in limiting Taliban gains has already been described, and the sortie rates involved have been shown in **Chart Twelve**. These sortie rates do, however, understate the value of U.S. aid because they do not describe the number of unmanned IS&R sorties or the U.S. capability to carry out a massive targeting and persistent strike effort far outside the areas where Afghan ground forces operate. This involves a level of “fusion” between different intelligence sources, secure satellite collection and communication, and links between U.S. air and ground forces that will all depart along with the rest of U.S. forces.

The Afghan Air Force is just developing the capabilities to provide effective combat air support to Afghan ground forces, and there are no plans to give it anything like the persistent and deep strike capabilities of U.S. forces or similar IS&R capabilities. These forces are shown in **Chart Nineteen**. The *LIG Quarterly Report* for the first quarter of 2020 summarizes the current modernization plan as follows:²¹¹

OUSD(P) reported to the DoD OIG that the DoD has not changed its strategy to transition the AAF from the Russian-made Mi-17 to U.S. rotary wing aircraft. However, the DoD has revised its procurement objectives for U.S. helicopters. According to its December 2019 semiannual report to Congress regarding security and stabilization in Afghanistan, the DoD approved the final phase of the Afghan aviation modernization plan, under which CH-47 Chinook twin-engine, tandem rotor, medium-lift helicopters will replace the Special Mission Wing's (SMW) Russian-made Mi-17 helicopters by 2023...

According to OUSD(P), CH-47s were not included in the original 2016 modernization plan because the DoD had not identified a feasible acquisition strategy. OUSD(P) stated that the DoD identified a strategy in 2018, which was approved as part of the overall aviation plan. Train Advise Assist Command-Air (TAAC-Air) reported that in order to sustain the aircraft, TAAC-Air calculated the amount of crews needed based on UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter deliveries and adjusted its plan to ensure the AAF has the appropriate amount of crews for the amount of aircraft.

According to OUSD(P), the plan is to procure up to 20 CH-47s from the U.S. Army and transfer them to the SMW. The DoD also reduced the number of UH-60s provided to the AAF and SMW from a planned 159 to a total of 53. OUSD(P) told DoD OIG that the change was based on a 2019 review that determined Afghan requirements could be met with fewer UH-60s... According to OUSD(P), the transition to the UH-60 is complete...

OUSD(P) reported that the SMW has identified pilot and maintainer candidates for the CH-47 program, and that these individuals were in English language training this quarter. Initial Entry Rotary Wing classes will expand from 20 to 25 students with the goal of providing for the additional pilots that the CH-47s will require. Afterward, prospective CH-47 pilots will attend a 9-month Aircraft Qualification Course conducted by contracted instructors at third country training locations using existing training contracts, after which they will attend 3 months of mission qualification training in Afghanistan, according to the DoD. OUSD(P) reported that it has planned a similar program to train CH-47 maintainers...

OUSD(P) officials stated that only the SMW will operate CH-47s to meet its requirement for a medium-lift aircraft capable of supporting special operations helicopter assault missions. OUSD(P) stated that it

anticipates the CH-47 program will face the same challenges as any other aviation program, such as ensuring a sufficient quantity of qualified personnel entering the training program and synchronizing training and aircraft fielding timelines. In the case of the SMW, this will involve maintaining the required combat power as existing pilots undergo retraining for the CH-47. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has already caused delays in English language training for pilot candidates. According to OUSD(P), the FY 2021 ASFF request included \$423 million for 10 CH-47s, parts, supplies, and equipment, which is a reasonable estimate and may vary slightly from the final appropriation.

TAAC-Air reported that the AAF had 194 aircraft as of the end of the quarter. Of the total AAF fleet of 194 aircraft, TAAC-Air reported that 154 aircraft were usable at the end of the quarter, which was a decrease from the previous quarter when the AAF had 167 usable aircraft out of a total of 193 ... TAAC-Air defines a "usable" aircraft as an aircraft that is in the country and available for missions or in short-term maintenance. TAAC-Air reported that the AAF had two confirmed "Class A" incidents during the quarter, referring to events that cause a loss of life, serious injury, or more than \$1 million in damage to the aircraft. The two incidents involved rotary wing (one Mi-17 and one 1 Mi-35 aircraft) and occurred on January 8 in Balkh province.

This is limited progress in absorbing combat aircraft even for an air force that is in its early stages of formation, and the challenges involved are compounded by having to train most forces from the ground up while attempting to create effective operations and maintenance support in a country with limited literacy and commercial technical expertise.

When it comes to funding and current readiness, the SIGAR *Quarterly Report* describes an Air Force that is still very much in transition in creating suitable readiness and operations capabilities, in spite of the relatively simple technical base for most of its assets,²¹²

...As of February 28, 2020, the United States had appropriated approximately \$8.5 billion to support and develop the AAF (including the SMW) from FY 2010 to FY 2020. The main change since last quarter was to the FY 2019 funds allocated for the AAF. The initial appropriation budget for FY 2019 was \$1.7 billion and is now \$986.8 million, the lowest level of funding authorized for the AAF since 2016. The reduction is primarily related to a \$191 million decrease for aircraft sustainment due to lower-than-projected costs of contractor logistics support (aircraft maintenance) contracts and a \$468 million decrease in equipment costs due largely to a reduction of the required number of UH-60 aircraft...

As in previous years, sustainment remains the costliest funding category for the AAF (65% of FY 2020 authorized funds). AAF sustainment costs primarily include contractor-provided maintenance, major and minor repairs, and procurement of parts and supplies for the AAF's in-country inventory of seven air platforms: UH-60, MD-530, and Mi-17 helicopters; A-29, C-208, and AC-208 fixed-wing aircraft; and C-130 transport aircraft...

Given the significant investment, SIGAR is conducting an audit to assess the extent to which (1) the AAF and SMW developed and implemented vetting policies and procedures that help identify corruption and potentially corrupt individuals, and (2) DOD has taken steps to ensure that the AAF and SMW recruit, train, and retain qualified personnel intended to contribute to professional and sustainable Afghan air forces.

... as of March 31, 2020, the AAF currently has 154 available aircraft and 177 aircraft in its inventory... TAAC-Air reported decrease of 12 available aircraft this quarter, and a decrease of seven aircraft in its total inventory. They said of the 12 aircraft to become unavailable for the AAF this quarter, one was a C-130 that went into depot-level maintenance; six Mi-17s became expired, were damaged, or were not returning from overhaul; one MD-530 was lost in combat; and four UH-60s were transferred to the SMW.

The AAF decreased flight hours considerably (by almost 26%), while the readiness of four of seven of its airframes increased this quarter (January–March 2020), compared to last quarter (October–December 2019). TAAC-Air said AAF flight hours decreased this quarter due to the reduction-in-violence period, which led to a decrease in strike missions; winter weather impeding flight operations (not out of the norm); and new flight rules due to the COVID-19 pandemic, under which the AAF only conducts combat sorties, not training sorties...

All airframes except the C-208 and the MD-530 met their readiness benchmarks, a slight decline from last quarter, when only one airframe (C-208) failed to meet its readiness benchmark... TAAC-Air explained that the C-208s had a large number of aircraft grounded this quarter due to a fuel-contamination issue at Kandahar Airfield at the end of January and the beginning of February, as well as long delays for repair parts, exacerbated by the pandemic conditions, which impacted several scheduled engine overhauls. The MD-530s had a safety issue that, until inspected and repaired, temporarily grounded the fleet...

The *LIG Quarterly Report* provides similar details, and it too warns how dependent the Afghan Air Force is on contractors – many foreign:²¹³

Like the ANA and ANP, the AAF and the Special Mission Wing rely on contracted logistics support to provide most required maintenance on their growing fleet. Overall, Resolute Support aviation advisers are seeking to increase Afghan maintenance capacity so that Afghans can perform an increasing share of aviation maintenance tasks, with contractors continuing to perform the most complex tasks.

U.S. advisors organize Afghan aircraft maintenance in three levels of increasing complexity: launch and recovery, organizational, and intermediate, with three different skill levels within each category...

... Afghan aircraft maintenance personnel have traditionally performed a greater share of maintenance on the Russian-made Mi-17 helicopter, which is being phased out. Afghans still do not perform any maintenance on the UH-60 helicopters or C-130 aircraft. All maintenance tasks for the C-130 and UH-60 aircraft are provided by contracted, non-Afghan logistics support. However, TAAC-Air reported that UH-60 maintenance capability will improve as the first cadre of graduates of AAF Aircraft Maintenance Development.

Center and Aircraft Maintenance Training programs begin work... TAAC-Air reported that 40 UH-60 students graduated in mid-March. However, due to procedures implemented because of COVID-19, contracted logistics support personnel have been separated from their Afghan counterparts, significantly delaying their ability to report to work and meet training goals to the changing composition and complexity of AAF maintenance requirements from month to month.

Finally the DoD 1225 Report addresses the precision strike capabilities of the Afghan Air Force in flattering terms, but it is clear that its light strike aircraft cannot duplicate anything like the capability of the U.S. and coalition aircraft that have supported the ANDSF in the past, or provide similar IS&R capabilities. This is a critical issue because the U.S. has not announced any guarantees as part of the peace process, and it can take months of operational experience to regain the targeting and strike capabilities the U.S. now has.

The report describes the ANAF's 10 light propeller-driven AC208 combat aircraft and 15 operational A-29 dual-seated propeller strike aircraft as follows:²¹⁴

The AC-208 Eliminator aircraft has provided ISR and strike capabilities in support of ANDSF ground and air operations since it was first fielded to the AAF in February 2019 following completion of training in the United States of the first crews. The AC-208 has a C-208 airframe but is equipped with a more powerful engine. The AC-208's primary capability is to employ precision-guided munitions, in particular the Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS) modification to the 2.75-inch Hydra rocket. It also is equipped with the MX-15 sensor, which is the most capable in the AAF. The MX-15, along with the APKWS, allows the AC-208 to be an extremely capable armed-ISR platform. The AC-208 also can "buddy lase," or guide a laser-guided bomb from an A-29, for partnered A-29 missions.

Since inception a year ago, ASFF-funded training efforts have produced 13 out of the 15 aircrews necessary for full operational AAF independence. These aircrews have developed new tactics, techniques and procedures for employment of illumination rockets to support night ANASOC ground operations and have provided integrated ISR and fires in support of day and night SMW helicopter assault force (HAF) operations.

The A-29's accuracy has increased significantly with precision-guided munitions, and A-29 pilots continue to achieve high accuracy with unguided bombs. The first night strike by an AAF A-29 occurred on December 8, 2018, adding a significant capability to the AAF. Since this first night strike, the A-29 has routinely flown night operations in defense of ANDSF forces during periods of darkness.

The AAF A-29 crew has been focusing on single-seat sensor operations with the acquisition of new software. This will eliminate the need for dual cockpit operations allowing for a more realistic attainment of current crew ratios. Afghan

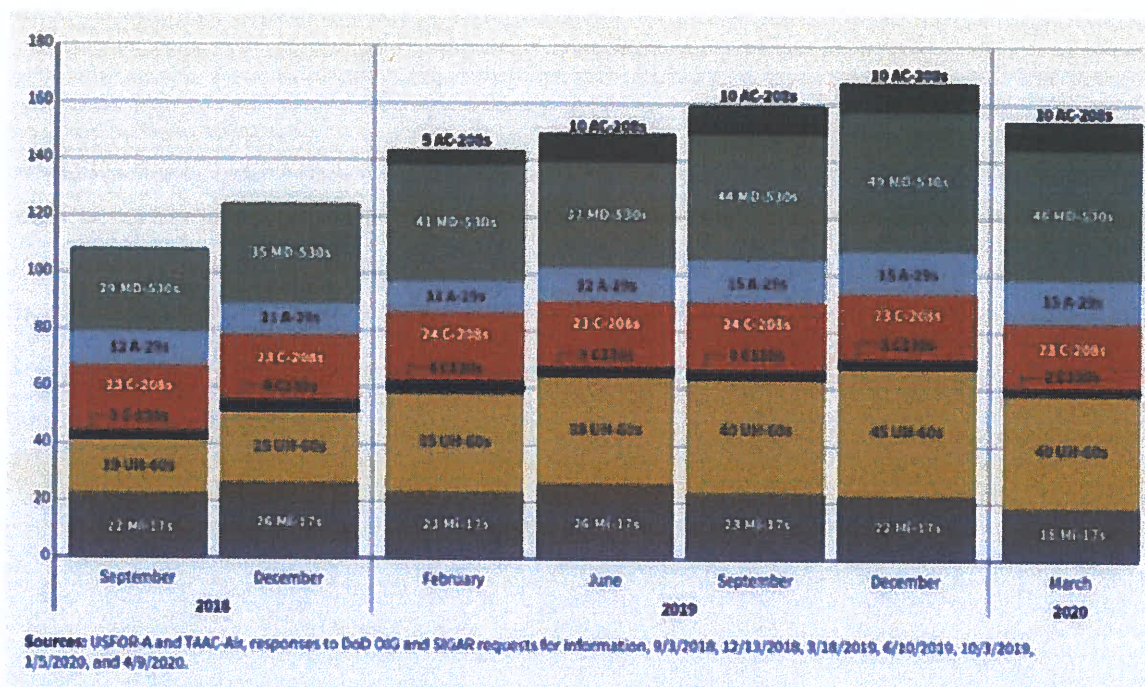
instructor pilots will soon be able to train Initial Qualification Training (IQT) students in-country with the transition of IQT from Moody Air Force Base to Afghanistan. The first IQT class conducted entirely outside the United States is projected to start by September 2020. The Afghan A-29 schoolhouse is expected to be fully operational by April 2021 with a total of 25 in-country aircraft. A-29 advisors and contract instructor pilots are currently supplementing the organic instructor cadre to meet the current training needs.

There have been challenges standing up maintenance training in Afghanistan after A-29 maintenance training conducted in the United States. As a result, a new training contract was awarded in February 2020. Training was set to begin in April but has been delayed due to COVID restrictions.

These are good light aircraft for a new air force in a country with a minimal technical base, but it is all too clear that they cannot equip a force that can compensate for the weaknesses in Afghan land forces, as U.S. and allied airpower have done to date. This will pose a major challenge in structuring some kind of Afghan forces that can shape and maintain a peace in the face of Taliban and extremist challenges.

Chart Nineteen: The Afghan Air Force: 2018-2020 – Part One

Afghan Air Force Useable Fleet, September 2018-March 2020



Percentage of AAF Maintenance Capability by Aircraft Type

	Aircraft	December 2018	March 2019	June 2019	September 2019	December 2019	March 2020
Fixed Wing	C-130	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	C-208	40%	40%	20%	20%	55%	40%
	AC-208	—	—	—	—	55%	40%
	AC-29	30%	30%	20%	20%	74%	30%
Rotary Wing	Mi-17	80%	85%	85%	80%	95%	95%
	MD-530	40%	40%	20%	20%	43%	20%
	UH-60	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: USFOR-A, TAAC-Air

Source: Lead Inspector General (LIG), *Quarterly Report to Congress on Operation Freedom's Sentinel*, January 1, 2020-March 31, 2020, May 19, 2020, pp. 31-32, <https://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/2191020/lead-inspector-general-for-operation-freedom-s-sentinel-i-quarterly-report-to-th/>.

Chart Nineteen: The Afghan Air Force: 2018-2020 – Part Two

Summary of AAF Airframes and Aircrews

	Type of Aircraft	Current Inventory	In Country & Available or in Short-term MX ³³	Number of Qualified Aircrew (Pilots and Co-Pilots)
Fixed Wing	C-130	4	2	9
	C-208	23	23	53
	AC-208	10	10	26
	A-29	25	15 ³⁴	29
Rotary Wing	Mi-17	24	17 ³⁵	44 ³⁶
	MD-530	54	49 ³⁷	64
	UH-60A+	43	43	69
	Total³⁸	174	149	294³⁹

Percentage of AAF Organic Maintenance and CLS (US & Foreign) Maintenance

	Aircraft	Percent Organic	Percent CLS
Fixed Wing	C-130	0	100
	C-208	40	60
	A-29	30	70
Rotary Wing	Mi-17	95	5
	MD-530	20	80
	UH-60A	0	100

**Mi-17 data does not include heavy repair or overhauls since the MoD does not possess the organic capability required to accomplish that level maintenance.*

Source: Excerpted by the author from *Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan*, Report to Congress in Accordance with Section 1225 of the National Defense Authorization Act, June 2020, pp. 61 & 70.

The Future Role of Taliban Forces

The Taliban's forces present equally serious issues in creating a stable peace. The military branch of the Taliban is headed by the Amir's two deputies, Mullah Omar's son, Yaqoob, and Jalaluddin Haqqani's son, Sirajuddin. Yaqoob Omar was appointed as the chief of the Taliban's military commission, and Sirajuddin Haqqani leads the Taliban's more hardline militant offshoot, the Haqqani Network.

While the leaders remain fairly consistent through a system based on bloodline, the actual fighters recruited by the Taliban are constantly changing. The Taliban has relied heavily on approximately two million Afghan refugees who are currently residing in Pakistan. With the constant influx of recruited members and the development of new commanders, the military branch of the Taliban operates its control through a decentralized structure.

A report by the UN Monitoring Team summarizes the Taliban's strength as follows:²¹⁵

Estimates by Member States of the number of Taliban fighters range from 55,000 to 85,000. As previously reported by the Monitoring Team, Taliban facilitators and non-combatants could bring the total figure to 100,000. Based on information available to the Monitoring Team, it is clear that the Taliban are not struggling with respect to recruitment, funding, weapons or ammunition.

Other open source estimates of the Taliban's strength range from a core of 25,000 experienced fighters to levels well over 70,000 – with an unknown number of part time supporters and fighters. Senior U.S officers have said in the past that the Taliban definitely has over 60,000 fighters, but those estimates have not indicated the definition of fighters or a possible limit to the numbers above 60,000. They have made it clear that such fighters often change their allegiance from one group to another. These figures assume that the ties between the Taliban and the Haqqani network are now so close that they are virtually integrated.²¹⁶

That said, there are no reliable "open source" estimates of the Taliban's military organization and strength, and the quality and depth of ANDSF and USFOR-A classified intelligence and assessments of the Taliban is unknown. So is the ability of the central government to collect intelligence on Taliban forces if U.S. forces withdraw and/or if the Taliban forces transform as part of a peace settlement.

A peace settlement must find some mix of new roles for these forces, potentially creating them as separate units or absorbing them into the government's forces. At the same time, they are supposed to assist in dealing with any extremist or terrorist forces that would "... use the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies."

Finding such a radically different role for so many fighters would be difficult if there were sharp ideological divisions between the Taliban and the government forces, if a future Afghan government was likely to be united enough to easily compromise on how its forces were to be structured and used, and if the Afghan economy could create enough new job opportunities to absorb large numbers of fighters on both sides. Currently, none of these conditions apply.

At present, the Taliban forces are also highly decentralized, well disbursed throughout the country (See **Chart Six**) and have a high degree of local leadership whose motivation and commitment to ideology versus political power and status is unclear. Most combat units seem to be well armed with squad level as well as light and man-portable weapons. There are also many covert units in central government-controlled areas that can gather intelligence, recruit, spread propaganda, and carry out target attacks and suicide attacks.

The level of control by the central Taliban's leadership is uncertain, as is the authority and independence of each of the Taliban's regional and political Shuras, and that of given local leaders. The number and nature of smaller units; loyalties to given Shura and factions; and the ability of the Taliban's central leadership to shape strategy, control operations, and control levels and methods of engagement is unclear, but also untested compared to the new environment that a real peace settlement would require.

This fragmentation and decentralization now makes the Taliban forces difficult to target, but it may lead to splits over the peace process, over post-peace efforts to absorb and disarm Taliban forces, and over rivalries within given elements of the Taliban fighters and with outside local power brokers.

The Taliban's leadership certainly faces a challenge in bringing all of the pieces of the military branch in a new role as part of some peacetime government – if a real peace is ever agreed upon. Reaching such an agreement will be no easy feat. The different radicalization of each branch and of the multiple commanders will not be conducive to form a consensus, and they will certainly be reluctant to disarm themselves after a “peace” is negotiated. Even during the current negotiations, different cells of the movement were still carrying out attacks and defying orders by the top political leadership.

How Do You Create Afghan Forces for Peace?

It should be noted that there are almost no reliable open source data on the organization, unity, combat leadership, and moral of the Taliban, ISIS-K, or Haqqani forces. They too have had nearly 20 years of stress and almost certainly have their own problems. At the same time, there are few reports of defectors, deserters, and internal clashes. Rebel forces can implode as well as government ones, but there is little evidence as of yet that this is likely to happen.

It is also all too clear that one of the key motives for joining the ANDSF has been the lack of any alternative jobs and the fact that the central government offers pay and there is the possibility of promotion and rises in status and pay. If a peace settlement is reached, the question will immediately arise as to how many men on each side will now be employed, what the incentives and disincentives are, and how each side – given factions, and power brokers – will try to exploit the situation.

Once again, a peace settlement may not change the fact that the real “voters” will be the men with the guns.

Afghanistan's Critical Economic Challenges: Before and During the Coronavirus Crisis

Like the reporting on Afghan governance, most of the reporting on the Afghan economy precedes the impact of the Coronavirus crisis and the new peace agreements. This reporting also generally relies on uncertain sources, on estimates rather than hard data, on the future implementation of reform plans, and on data that have been “spun” by the central government and aid donors to make the situation appear more favorable.

There has been real progress military and economic progress in some areas, but much of that progress slowed after 2008-2011, as the Taliban became more successful and the political turmoil in Afghanistan made reform plans even harder to implement. It has also become clear that the Coronavirus will have a critical impact on the Afghan economy, and that Afghanistan is already suffering as Afghans in Iran and Pakistan are being pushed out of these countries.

For all the usual focus on growth in the GDP as a critical goal, this also is only one goal for Afghanistan which must seek peace, unity, more equitable distribution of income, and the creation of jobs and opportunities for a quickly growing population. Focusing on growth alone ignores critical problems that are important even if one ignores corruption and a pattern of income distribution that favors a comparatively small elite.

World Bank experts estimate that the poverty levels in Afghanistan have been rising since 2008. UN and other data indicate that infant mortality and child malnutrition rates are extremely high, it is also clear that Afghanistan has one of the lowest gross national incomes (GNIs) per capita in the world. World Bank estimates are dated but show that Afghanistan's GNI per capita dropped from \$630 in 2014 to \$600 in 2015, to \$570 in 2016, to \$560 in 2017, to \$550 in 2018, and to \$540 in 2019.²¹⁷

The CIA July 2020 Factbook Appraisal

The CIA *World Factbook* summarizes the Afghan economy as follows: ²¹⁸

Despite improvements in life expectancy, incomes, and literacy since 2001, Afghanistan is extremely poor, landlocked, and highly dependent on foreign aid. Much of the population continues to suffer from shortages of housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, and jobs. Corruption, insecurity, weak governance, lack of infrastructure, and the Afghan Government's difficulty in extending rule of law to all parts of the country pose challenges to future economic growth. Afghanistan's living standards are among the lowest in the world. Since 2014, the economy has slowed, in large part because of the withdrawal of nearly 100,000 foreign troops that had artificially inflated the country's economic growth.

The CIA indicates that Afghanistan has the 19th lowest per capita income in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms of any country in the world. While the figures again are dated, it estimates that 54.5% of the population lives below a very low poverty line in 2017, and unemployment was 23.9%.

The dependency ratio is 88.8 and the potential support ratio is 21, Afghanistan also has the world's highest infant mortality rate, the 11th highest maternal mortality rate, and a life expectancy of 52.8 years – the lowest in the world. Drinking water and sanitation still present critical problems. Literacy at age 15 and above is only 43%, and education levels average only 10 years for those who attend school even in a country where a student can be missing for up to three years before being counted as absent.²¹⁹

The SIGAR April 2020 Appraisal

SIGAR provides a similar economic profile in its *April 30, 2020 Quarterly Report*:²²⁰

Afghanistan remains impoverished, conflict-affected, and heavily aid dependent. While the overall economic goal of the current U.S. strategy is to move Afghanistan from being a recipient of assistance to an enduring economic partner, donor grants totaling \$8.5 billion per year (combined security and civilian assistance) currently finance approximately 75% of total public expenditures...Afghanistan's real, licit GDP growth rate averaged just under 10% over the first decade of reconstruction, driven by donor funding and a large international troop presence. But the growth rate dropped substantially as the Afghan government assumed responsibility for the fight against the Taliban insurgency...

In more hopeful recent developments, the World Bank reported that the Afghan economy grew by 2.9% in 2019, catalyzed by the end of a prolonged drought and higher levels of snowfall and precipitation during the winter of 2018–2019...However, the Bank said that higher agricultural growth was partially offset by lower growth in the industrial and services sectors.

Despite the growth-rate increase, poverty likely worsened in 2019, the Bank added. Though favorable weather improved rural livelihoods for some Afghans, the effects were uneven, as continued internal displacement may have had adverse effects on the timing of agricultural planting. Overall, private-sector confidence remained weak in 2019, reflected in excess liquidity and stagnant loan-to-deposit ratios in the commercial banking sector.

While USAID says that, in the mid-term, its programs “will help accelerate private sector-driven and export-led economic growth,” slowing export growth in 2019, compounded by the global pandemic, challenges this expectation. The Bank expected that Afghanistan's trade deficit would grow, with exports unable to keep pace with imports. Afghanistan's poor licit trade situation is attributable to persistent conflict, the country's landlocked geography (which significantly raises the costs of trade, relative to countries with direct access to commercial sea routes), low levels of infrastructure and institutional capacity, and limited access to electricity and finance. However, these obstacles do not preclude Afghanistan from exporting large amounts of opium, which dwarf the country's licit exports...

Although the Bank anticipated in late-January that growth would climb to 3.3% in 2020, that was before the emergence of COVID-19, which has since brought the global economy to a veritable standstill. The specter of significant economic disruption in Afghanistan due to the spread of the novel coronavirus looms large.

The Current IMF Country Report

Some of the best reporting on the Afghan economy comes from international organizations. The latest IMF country report on Afghanistan was issued on December 20, 2019 – and precedes the peace agreements and the arrival of the Coronavirus – but it is still grim. The summary states that,²²¹

Afghanistan is a fragile, aid-dependent country where insecurity combined with episodes of political uncertainty and adverse weather events have kept real GDP growth below 3 percent in recent years. In early September, U.S.-Taliban talks on a U.S. troop withdrawal as a basis for peace negotiations were suspended, with uncertainty as to the timing of their resumption. Presidential elections were held at end-September, but results have yet to be announced. The international community continues to support Afghanistan with civilian and military assistance and is pressing for intra-Afghan peace talks and an immediate reduction in violence. The authorities have expressed an interest in a new financial arrangement to support reforms.

World Bank Cost of Peace Warnings

There is no way to know how either the real-world course of the peace effort or the impact of the Coronavirus will actually affect Afghanistan at this point in time. The World Bank has, however, issued a report called “Financing Peace,” which provides further data on the challenges Afghanistan faces.²²²

This World Bank analysis does not address key issues like narcotics, corruption, employment, trends in per capita income, inequities by region and faction, and distribution of wealth. Nevertheless, it makes key points that show Afghanistan still faces critical economic problems, and that the success of any peace effort is almost certain to be dependent on extremely high levels of external aid: 223

Under a baseline scenario of continued slow economic growth and moderate improvement in revenues, grant needs would range between US\$5.8 billion and US\$7.6 billion per year. US\$5.8 billion per year would be sufficient to finance maintenance of existing services and gradual expansion of infrastructure in line with population growth. US\$7 billion per year would be sufficient to finance current services and infrastructure with additional investments to support more-rapid growth (including human capital and infrastructure improvements). US\$7.6 billion per year would be sufficient to meet current infrastructure and service costs, finance growth-enhancing investments, and provide resources for additional programs to sustain and consolidate peace, including through expanded community development and job creation programs.

A precipitous decline in grant resources, however, would force very difficult trade-offs between important policy objectives. A precipitous reduction in either security or civilian grants would force a choice between: i) sustaining security spending; ii) maintaining the delivery of basic government functions (such as social services and infrastructure); iii) undertaking required public investments to support faster economic growth and poverty reduction; and iv) delivering short-term benefits to Afghans following a political settlement to help to sustain and consolidate peace. Benefits of short-term post settlement programming are likely to be short-lived if they come at the cost of continued investment in the basic functions of government and the core service delivery mechanisms that have been built up since 2001.

Expectations should be realistic regarding the capacity of new grant-financed programs to deliver a substantial peace dividend. Resources available for delivering a post settlement dividend are likely to remain limited under any scenario, relative to the extent of grant support already being provided. The most significant benefits of a political settlement are likely to be realized if such a settlement leads to improvements in security, political stability, and freedom of movement. Increased private sector investment, job creation, and access to services resulting from such improvements is likely to deliver much more significant and sustainable benefits than grant-financed interventions. This is especially the case given the current context of already-unsustainably high public expenditure and likely declines in grant support over the medium-term.

... Post-settlement programming is likely to occur in the context of tight resource constraints. Grant support to Afghanistan remains at extremely high levels. The future level of grant support is subject to substantial uncertainty, with current pledges extending only through 2020. Declines in grant support are expected over the medium-term.

... Public expenditure in Afghanistan is at high and unsustainable levels. Total public expenditure is equal to around 58 percent of GDP, much higher than average for a low-income country. High total expenditure is driven by very substantial security sector expenditures. Security spending accounts for just over half of total expenditures. Security spending is equal to around 30 percent of GDP, compared to just three percent for the average low-income country.

... While revenue performance has improved significantly over recent years, total revenues fall far short of expenditures. Afghanistan has achieved remarkable progress in increasing revenues over recent years, with total government revenues increasing from around 8 percent of GDP in 2014 to around 13.5 percent today. Government revenues are currently comparable to those of other South Asian countries. However, total revenues are currently equal to only around US\$2.5 billion dollars per year, while total on- and off-budget expenditures are equal to around US\$11 billion per year.

Afghanistan therefore remains heavily reliant on grants. Reflecting the wide gap between revenues and expenditures, Afghanistan continues to rely on grants to finance 75 percent of total public expenditures. Total grants are equal to around US\$8.5 billion per year. This is equal to around 45 percent of GDP, compared to an average of around 10 percent for low income countries.

... Economic growth in Afghanistan is currently too slow to reduce poverty and increase living standards. The economy is currently growing by around two percent per year, while the population is growing at around 2.3 percent per year. This equates to declining per capita incomes. Poverty rates are rapidly increasing, with

the number of Afghans living below the basic needs poverty line (of around US\$1 per day) increasing from around 39 percent in 2012 to around 55 percent today. The number of jobs available to Afghans is currently declining, while 300,000 young people enter the labor force every year. While a reduction in violence may facilitate improvements in growth, employment, and living standards, substantial public investments to improve services and expand infrastructure are likely to be needed to mobilize new growth sources that could drive a step-change in economic growth.

... Grant financing to both the civilian and security sectors is channeled through trust fund and bilateral mechanisms. The largest single source of on-budget civilian support to Afghanistan is through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), administered by the World Bank. The ARTF provides around US\$800 million of on-budget grant support per year, complemented by around US\$400 million of World Bank International Development Association (IDA) resources. Additional on-budget support is provided through the Asian Development Bank-administered Afghanistan Infrastructure Trust Fund (AITF).

... Current security sector expenditure in Afghanistan is approximately US\$5.6 billion. Security expenditures are financed overwhelmingly through grants, with security grants equal to around US\$4.9 billion per year ... Under the assumption of an improvement in security conditions and realization of potential savings, security expenditures are projected to decline to around US\$4 billion by 2024. This represents a US\$1.6 billion reduction from current levels arising from both efficiency improvements and any potential change in force size and composition.

... The largest source of on-budget security support is the Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan (CSTC-A), which currently provides around US\$900 million per year to the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior. The UNDP-administered Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA) provides an additional US\$300 million per year of on-budget support.

Base civilian expenditure needs include the provision of basic services and infrastructure. *Total on-budget base civilian expenditure is currently around US\$3.6 billion per year. Of this amount, around US\$1 billion is spent on salaries and wages, with the majority of salary expenditure allocated to social sectors. Other operating costs are equal to around US\$1 billion per year. Around US\$1.2 billion a year is spent on capital acquisition, almost entirely through the development budget. These expenditures represent the core functions of government, including the delivery of health and education and key investments in roads, energy, and irrigation.*

Base on-budget civilian expenditure needs are expected to grow over time. Base civilian expenditure needs are expected to grow over time for two primary reasons. Firstly, Afghanistan's population is growing rapidly (at around 2.3 percent per year). Some level of expenditure growth is required simply to sustain the current level of services to an expanding population. Secondly, Afghanistan is currently significantly underinvesting in operations and maintenance (O&M) expenditures. GoIRA is taking on responsibility for operating and maintaining assets provided by donors. Previous analysis has shown that Afghanistan must increase investment in O&M expenditure to around seven percent of GDP to effectively sustain the current asset base and avoid a deterioration in services and infrastructure.

Based on conservative assumptions, base on-budget civilian expenditure needs are expected to increase to around US\$4.2 billion by 2024. This represents an increase of around US\$500 million per annum over current levels. This assumes: i) constant per capita on-budget expenditure on services and infrastructure (taking no account of potential expansion of services to new areas following a political settlement); and ii) Gradual increases in O&M expenditure to the equivalent of seven percent of GDP by 2024 (from a current level of around five percent of GDP).

Popular Perceptions of the Economy: The Asia Foundation Survey

The Asia Foundation Survey of the Afghan People summarized the state of Afghanistan's economy in 2019 as follows:²²⁴

Since Afghanistan's 2014 transition, when Afghan forces assumed control of security from international forces, the Afghan economy has persistently experienced sluggish growth: 1.4% annual growth in 2015, 2.3% in 2016, 2.7% in 2017, and 1.0% in 2018, the slowest since 2001.¹ International official aid, a main driver of this growth, dropped from USD 6.5 billion in 2010 to USD 4.3 billion in 2015 and has continued to fall

since then.² Nevertheless, the government remains dependent on grants, and a major part of its budget (51% of the budget for the fiscal year 2018/2019) is funded through donor assistance.

According to the World Bank, there are two major reasons for the economic downturn of 2018. First, in late 2017 and early 2018, Afghanistan experienced the worst drought in decades, which has caused a sharp decline in agricultural and livestock productivity. Second, the business environment and investor confidence deteriorated due to intensifying violence and ongoing political uncertainty... Poverty has grown deeper and more widespread due to drought conditions, internal displacement, and low economic growth. The bulk of the poor population lives in drought-affected rural areas, leading to a large increase in the number of the displaced, which has reached a record level of 298,000 individuals.

Roughly 54% of the population now lives below the national poverty line, compared to 38.3% in 2011–12. Poverty is inextricably linked with the quality and quantity of employment in the economy, especially when there is no social safety net for the unemployed. Nearly one-fourth of the labor force is unemployed in Afghanistan, and 20.5% of those who are working are underemployed,⁵ both staggeringly high numbers.

Unemployment is markedly higher for women than men across all age categories and education levels.⁶ Among all age groups, youth (15 to 24 years old) and senior citizens (age 65 and above) suffer from higher levels of unemployment than others.⁷ More than half of respondents, 55.0%, say the employment opportunities for their households have worsened. And, more than one-third, 31.1%, say that the financial situation of their household has worsened.

Despite the drought that brought reduced agricultural production and the threat of higher domestic food prices, inflation remained modest in 2018 due to lower food and vegetable prices in the greater region and increased imports of those items into the economy.⁸ The Afghani depreciated 9.0% against the U.S. dollar in 2018, largely due to global strengthening of the dollar and to some extent to the outflow of U.S. dollars from Afghanistan to neighboring economies. The Afghani's rapid depreciation against the U.S. dollar continued through the first half of 2019, prompting concerns about rising price (especially for grain prices)

...

Its survey of Afghan Public opinion found that, ²²⁵

...people remain deeply concerned about their household economy. Of the 58.2% of Afghans surveyed who say that the country is going in the wrong direction, 26.6% cite unemployment, 12.8% cite the bad economy, and 4.2% cite high prices. More than three-quarters of respondents (77.7%) perceive economic difficulties to be the biggest problem facing youth,¹ and this is consistent regardless of gender or place of residence. This year, 54.9% of respondents say the employment opportunities for their households have worsened, similar to last year (57.2%).

It also found that there was no way to survey unemployment in a technical sense, but that, "Overall, 45.9% of respondents this year say they are involved in an activity that generates money, compared to 46.3% last year. Across all age groups, income earning is least common among 18- to 25-years-olds (36.2%)—presumably because they are students or lack job skills—and those of age 75 or above (33.1%). Generating an income is more common among respondents aged 26 to 65 years, more than half of whom (50.2%) say they do earn income. Lack of a social safety net in the country adds further pressure to the job market."²²⁶

The Limits of Outside Aid: Micro-Solutions Do Not Solve Macro-Problems

Both the SIGAR and LIG reports address the achievements and limits of economic aid, but the SIGAR report focuses heavily on critical details that warn that past and present outside aid efforts have critical problems. SIGAR reports that the United States appropriated approximately \$137.05 billion for reconstruction and related activities in Afghanistan since FY 2002 as of March 30, 2020. Total U.S. support of Afghanistan reconstruction funding was allocated as follows:²²⁷

- \$86.37 billion for security (including \$4.59 billion for counternarcotics initiatives)
- \$35.06 billion for governance and development (\$4.36 billion for counternarcotics initiatives)
- \$3.92 billion for humanitarian aid

- \$11.70 billion for civilian operations

In addition, SIGAR reports that the United States has provided more than \$15.89 billion in on-budget assistance to the government of Afghanistan since 2002. This includes nearly \$10.30 billion provided to Afghan government ministries and institutions, and more than \$5.59 billion to three multinational trust funds – the World Bank-managed Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), the United Nations Development Program-managed Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA), and the Asian Development Bank-managed Afghanistan Infrastructure Trust Fund (AITF).²²⁸

SIGAR mentions, but does not analyze or assess, international funding of Afghanistan relief and reconstruction efforts through multilateral institutions. These institutions include multilateral trust funds; United Nations and nongovernmental humanitarian assistance organizations; and two multilateral development-finance institutions, the World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank. The four main multilateral trust funds are the World Bank-managed Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)-managed Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA), the NATO-managed Afghan National Army (ANA) Trust Fund (NATO ANA Trust Fund or NATF), and the Asian Development Bank-administered Afghanistan Infrastructure Trust Fund (AITF). These trust funds have received \$30.92 billion in total – \$8.13 billions of which came from the United States.²²⁹

Chart Twenty shows that SIGAR reporting provides a graph showing the massive turbulence and short terms peaks in economic aid. The SIGAR report also makes it clear that the ability to plan, execute, and monitor aid has declined steadily since the U.S. withdrew most of its combat forces, and that most reconstruction aid programs have served only a tiny part of the Afghan population and economy – they have at best been “micro” solutions to the massive macroeconomic problems Afghanistan now faces. Some, like spending nearly \$9 billion on counternarcotics, have proved to be little more than a waste of money.

Many individual programs did a great deal for the Afghans directly involved, and they were well shaped and managed by USAID officials that made considerable sacrifices to take the assignment, but a careful reading of the SIGAR *Quarterly Report* for the first quarter of 2020 shows that the same problems that affected military aid programs affected civil programs.²³⁰

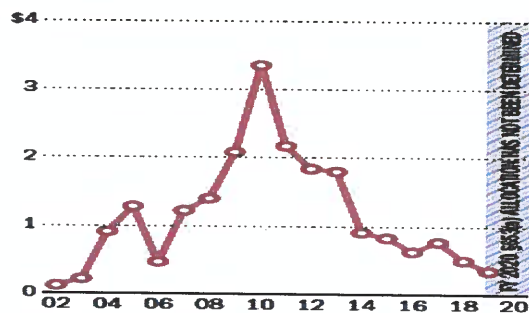
The U.S. economic aid effort was far too small at the start, rose to erratic peaks, and then was generally cut to minimal levels. Annual tours of duty for U.S. personnel, constant changes in programs, a lack of control over spending and corruption, and a lack of proper monitoring of activity and effectiveness wasted much of the funding. Grandiose claims were often made for programs with token success – like the education and creation of job opportunities for women – and broader claims of progress in areas like health were countered by far less optimistic assessments by other U.S. government voices like the CIA.²³¹

This is not an argument against aid. It is a warning that good intentions, pilot programs, and project aid do not change entire economies, and they do not win the support of large segments of the population. Scale, the quality and honesty of implementation, and honest reporting on effectiveness are critical.

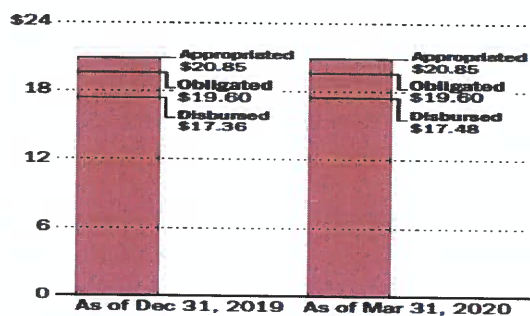
Chart Twenty: The Massive Fiscal Turbulence in Major Afghan Economic Aid Programs

Economic Support Fund (ESF)

ESF APPROPRIATIONS BY FISCAL YEAR
(\$ BILLIONS)

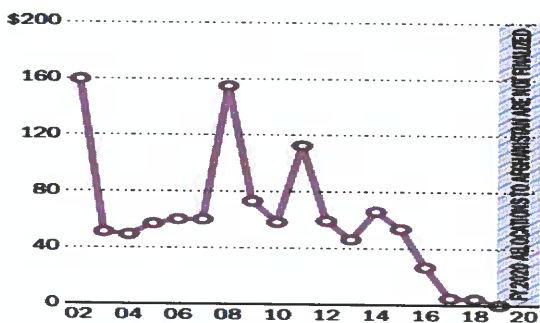


ESF FUNDS, CUMULATIVE COMPARISON
(\$ BILLIONS)

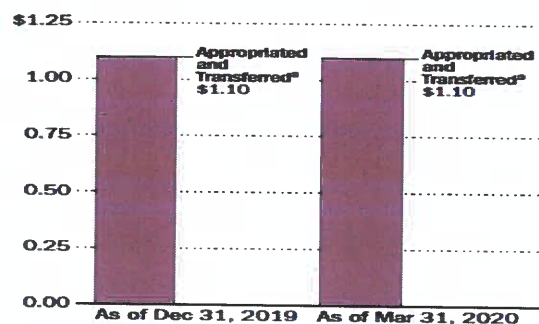


USAID's Office of Food for Peace (FFP) administers Public Law 480 Title II and International Disaster Assistance (IDA)

TITLE II APPROPRIATIONS BY FISCAL YEAR
(\$ MILLIONS)

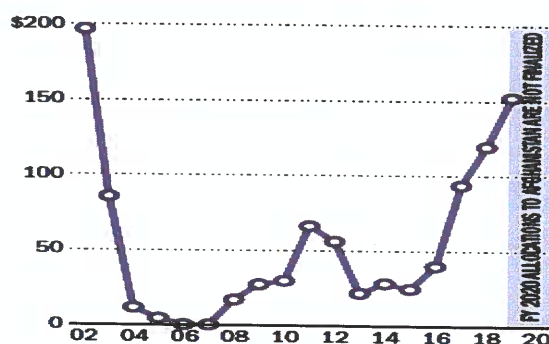


TITLE II FUNDS, CUMULATIVE COMPARISON
(\$ BILLIONS)

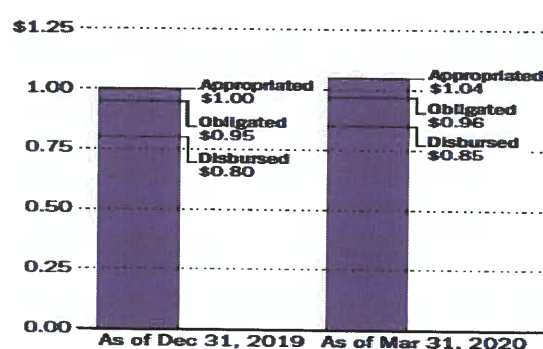


International Disaster Assistance (IDA) Funds

IDA APPROPRIATIONS BY FISCAL YEAR
(\$ MILLIONS)



IDA FUNDS, CUMULATIVE COMPARISON
(\$ BILLIONS)



The “New Silk Road” is Actually the “Old Opium Road”

The Afghan economy continues to rely on massive exports of narcotics, the country’s only major source of export income. Some current estimates indicate that Afghanistan now exports some 70% of the world’s traffic in natural opium, and a previous Burke Chair report notes that,²³²

... the report can only make guesstimates about the economic impact of Afghan narcotrafficking. It seems clear, however, that narcotics have earned at least \$2.0 billion in hard currency in recent years, and the total may well have been over \$3 billion by 2017. The CIA *World Factbook* estimates that the total legal exports from Afghanistan only totaled \$619 million in 2016. These legal exports would be only be 31% of the \$2 billion figure for drugs and 21% of the \$3 billion figure. This truly makes Afghanistan a narco-economy.

It is equally important to stress that narcotics are only part of Afghan criminal network activity and corruption – a critical issue in a country that Transparency International ranked as the sixth most corrupt country on the world in 2016, and whose rank had risen to fourth in 2017 – despite what were supposed to be major anti-corruption activities.

As **Chart Twenty-One** shows, SIGAR’s April 30, 2020 report reinforces this analysis. It also states that,²³³

Afghanistan’s Economic Performance Is Highly Sensitive to Narcotics Trade; when illicit activity is included in Afghanistan’s gross domestic product (GDP), the success or failure of the opium trade is shown to have a greater impact on growth than any other factor. The country’s National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA), which includes the opium economy in one version of its GDP figures, reported that when estimated opium production dropped by nearly 30% due to a supply surplus and a widespread drought in 2018, the Afghan economy contracted by 0.2%. That figure differs substantially from the NSIA’s licit-only growth rate figure of 2.7%.

By contrast, the NSIA reported that GDP growth including the opium economy in 2017 was 7.2%, due to a nearly 90% increase in opium production. Afghanistan’s licit GDP growth rate in 2017 was 2.7%, according to the Bank and IMF.

Unlike the NSIA, neither the IMF nor the World Bank consider the narcotics economy in their GDP growth estimates. However, there appears to be increasing interest from the Bank on this issue. In a March 2020 paper described by its authors as “the first ... to consider impacts [of conflict] across formal, informal, and illicit activities simultaneously,” the Bank found that while violence in Afghanistan negatively impacted licit economic activity, conflict had little impact on aggregate economic activity due to the high prevalence of opium-poppy cultivation.

A later section of the SIGAR Report notes that,²³⁴

The IMF and the World Bank’s economic analysis ignores the most important factor to Afghanistan’s growth rate in recent years: the nourishing opium trade. Afghanistan’s National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA), which includes the opium economy in one version of its GDP figures, reported that when estimated opium production dropped by nearly 30% due to a supply surplus and a widespread drought in 2018, Afghanistan’s economy contracted by 0.2%.

That figure differs substantially from the NSIA’s licit-only growth rate figure of 2.7%. Unlike the NSIA, neither the IMF nor the World Bank considers the narcotics economy in their GDP growth estimates.

By contrast, the NSIA reported that GDP growth including the opium economy in 2017 was 7.2%, due to a nearly 90% increase in opium production. Afghanistan’s licit GDP growth rate in 2017 was 2.7%, according to the Bank and IMF.

The impact the narcotics economy can have on Afghanistan’s economic growth rate is reflected by its size. According to the UNODC, the overall value of the opium economy in 2018 (between \$1.2 billion and \$2.2 billion) was equivalent to 6%–11% of the country’s licit GDP. As has become typical for Afghanistan, the value of opiates available for export in that year (between \$1.1 billion and \$2.1 billion) was much larger than the combined value of all licit exports (\$875 million).

There is very little authoritative reporting on which elements of the central government or which power brokers support the illicit trade and are actively involved in narcotics trafficking, but the number has to substantially include actors in the government and some elements of the ANDSF. There also is little analysis of the extent to which in-country processing of the drug is replacing the export of raw opium, but this seems to be a logical development given the profit margins involved.

One thing that is clear is that the Taliban is deeply involved in the drug trade. Chart Twenty-One shows that it did halt production for one year in 2001, but this was largely because previous exports had saturated the market and cut prices, alongside the fighting that preoccupied the Taliban. The UN report issued in May 2020 states that,²³⁵

While heroin cultivation and production have provided the bulk of Taliban revenue for many years, the emergence of methamphetamine in Afghanistan is giving impetus to a major new drug industry with significant profit margins... Interdiction of methamphetamine was first recorded by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2014 (9 kilograms) and has continued on a sharp upward trajectory, with 650 kilograms interdicted in the first half of 2019. Methamphetamine was stated to be more profitable than heroin because its ingredients are low-cost and it does not require large laboratories. The Taliban were reported to be in control of 60 per cent of methamphetamine laboratories in the key producing provinces of Farah and Nimruz.

An essential precursor component for production, namely ephedrine, had previously been imported, but was now being sourced locally (in Afghanistan the plant is known as *Ephedra oxyphylla*). Interlocutors of the Monitoring Team had no estimate as to how much revenue the Taliban were deriving from it but UNODC observed that methamphetamine production was growing more quickly than could be monitored and had a profit margin that far exceeded that of heroin. Afghan-produced methamphetamine is being used by an estimated 95 per cent of heroin users in Kabul. Both UNODC and Combined Maritime Forces' Combined Task Force 150 have recorded shipments of Afghan methamphetamine smuggled to Australia, Central Asia, the Gulf States, the Islamic Republic of Iran and South Africa.

In the period following the operations against ISIL-K in Nangarhar Province, evidence has emerged of how narcotics networks at the district and cross-border level drive financial flows to the Taliban. Over several years, the occupation by ISIL-K of key smuggling routes in Nangarhar blocked access to traditional growing areas and routes used by Taliban-affiliated networks. During that period, Taliban narcotics-related activity, based mainly in Hisarak and Sherzad Districts, were forced to use traditional road networks through government-held territory, increasing costs and the risk of interdiction for smugglers.

According to Member States, narcotic smuggling networks operate in Nangarhar and into Pakistan with the reported acquiescence of security officials who regulate and profit from the smuggling of heroin, hashish and other goods. Security officials reportedly allowed smuggling syndicates, known as *tanzeems*, to operate without fear of arrest in return for a portion of the profit. Revenues were ultimately shared between security officials, heads of the *tanzeems* and the Taliban. Interlocutors stated that this system was "a big source of revenue for the Taliban".

53. Officials described a system of heroin smuggling and taxation organized by the Taliban that stretched across eight of Nangarhar's southern districts from Hisarak to Dur Baba, on the border with Pakistan. Heroin produced in Hisarak in the westernmost area of Nangarhar was trafficked eastward through Sherzad, Khogyani, Pachir wa Agam, Deh Bala, Achin, Naziyan and Dur Baba. In each district smugglers paid a tax to district Taliban commanders of 200 Pakistan rupees (approximately \$1.30), or its equivalent in Afghanis, per kilogram of heroin. Smugglers were provided documentation by each Taliban commander certifying payment of tax before proceeding to the next district and repeating the same process. Afghan officials stated that the smuggling routes thus helped to financially empower each district Taliban commander...

So far, the peace negotiations have dodged around these realities, and the UN has conspicuously failed to provide the United Nations Offices on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) annual survey of the Afghan narcotics trade for 2019, and it only provides 2018 data on Afghanistan in its World Drug

Reports for 2019 – possibly because the U.S. has not provided the necessary data. As is the case with so many potentially embarrassing aspects of the peace agreement, withholding or classifying data and analysis seems to be a key tool in dodging critical issues.

The 2018 UNDOC report on Afghanistan warned, however, that the incentives for producing and exporting opium were growing and had long had a major impact on the rural part of Afghanistan's economy,²³⁶

The continuing high levels of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan create multiple challenges for the country, its neighbors and the many other countries that are transit for or destination of Afghan opiates. The significant levels of opium poppy cultivation and illicit trafficking of opiates will probably continue to fuel instability, insurgency and provide funding to terrorist groups in Afghanistan. More high quality, low cost heroin will reach consumer markets across the world, with increased consumption and related harms as a likely consequence.

Addressing the opiate problem in Afghanistan remains a shared responsibility. Only a small share of the revenues generated by the cultivation and trafficking of Afghan opiates remains in Afghanistan. This year's decrease of the farm-gate value of opium means that less money is available for Afghan farmers to purchase food, have medical expenses, and purchase daily needs products. If no legal alternatives are made available to help Afghanistan and its impoverished rural population to cope with its economic and social challenges, the current negative consequences of the already existing large-scale production of opiates will be reinforced.

The illicit economy, which in many provinces has permeated rural societies and made many communities dependent on the income from opium poppy, will constrain the development of the licit economy and potentially further fuel corruption. If prices continue to decrease, the situation of already impoverished farmers will become even more precarious, with the potential consequence of further expansion of the area under cultivation at cost of other, licit crops. The continued availability of cheap opium and heroin in the country might affect opiate use and its social and economic costs for drug users, their families, and for society in general.

While opium production has fallen considerably compared to last year, it is still at a high level and billions of dollars will be made from converting opium into heroin and trafficking it into major consumer markets, mainly in Europe and Asia. Moreover, the transformation of opium into heroin is likely to bring increased trafficking of precursor substances. Tons of precursor chemicals will potentially be diverted from licit international markets and smuggled into Afghanistan to supply manufacturers of heroin.

To support the Afghan Government in its efforts to counter illicit crop cultivation, continuing analysis and monitoring of the links between the rule of law, illicit drug cultivation, production, and trafficking is required. In addition, more information would be needed about changes along opiate trafficking routes in transit and destination countries, including information about use and prices, to be able to determine possible consequences and policy considerations for Afghanistan and the international community of the continuing high opium production.

... The continuously decreasing prices point towards a market saturation. Even though supply of opium reduced compared to the last year, the still very high levels of production seem to overfull-fill the demand in the market, which reacts with decreasing prices for opium gum.

The UNDOC World Drug Report for 2018 reflects similar trends,²³⁷

Growing by some 37 per cent from the previous year, the total global area under opium poppy cultivation has doubled since 2006 to reach almost 418,000 hectares in 2017. This was primarily the result of a marked increase in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, which accounted for 86 per cent of global opium production in 2017. There is no single reason for the increase in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan as many complex and geographically diverse elements influence farmers' decisions to cultivate opium poppy. A combination of events, including political instability, corruption and a lack of government control and security may have exacerbated rule of law challenges. By shifting its focus to combatting anti-government elements in densely populated areas, the Afghan Government may have made the rural population more vulnerable. A reduction in the engagement of the international aid community may also have hindered socioeconomic development opportunities in rural areas.

The UNDOC World Drug Report for 2018 provided a further analysis stating that,²³⁸

The surge in global production primarily reflects an 87 per cent increase in opium production in Afghanistan to a record high of 9,000 tons, equivalent to 86 per cent of estimated global opium production in 2017. The increase in production in Afghanistan was not only due to an increase in the area under poppy cultivation but also to improving opium yields.

There is no single reason for the massive increase in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan in 2017 as the drivers are multiple, complex and geographically diverse, and many elements continue to influence farmers' decisions regarding opium poppy cultivation. A combination of events may have exacerbated rule-of-law challenges, such as political instability, corruption, a lack of government control and security.

The shift in strategy by the Afghan Government — focusing its efforts on countering anti-government elements in densely populated areas — may have made the rural population more vulnerable to the influence of anti-government elements. A reduction in the engagement of the international aid community may also have hindered socioeconomic development opportunities in rural areas.

As a result of the massive increase in opium production in 2017, opium prices fell in Afghanistan by 47 per cent from December 2016 to December 2017. However, the price of high-quality Afghan heroin decreased by just 7 per cent over the same period, which may be an indication that heroin manufacture to date has increased far less than opium production.

Of the 10,500 tons of opium produced worldwide in 2017, it is estimated that some 1,100–1,400 tons remained unprocessed for consumption as opium, while the rest was processed into heroin, resulting in an estimate of between 700 and 1,050 tons of heroin manufactured worldwide (expressed at export purity), 550–900 tons of which were manufactured in Afghanistan.

The UNDOC survey for 2018 also makes it clear, however, that the only serious limits on narcotics production are rainfall disease and the fact that global oversupply limits the price. It provides the data shown in **Chart Twenty-Two**. It shows that the only successful counternarcotics effort was in 2001 – a major war year and one in which the Taliban restricted planting more because of oversupply relative to price than out of any ideological considerations – compared to production in the previous years of Taliban's governance shows.

As for production in the post-2001 period, it is clear that counternarcotics efforts have only had token impacts, and the maps of crop growth shown in the full UNDOC survey for 2018 show the Taliban has since tolerated and exploited narco-trafficking for its own benefit. If there is a major force affecting Afghan production, it is now the increased competition from cheaper and stronger synthetic opioids.

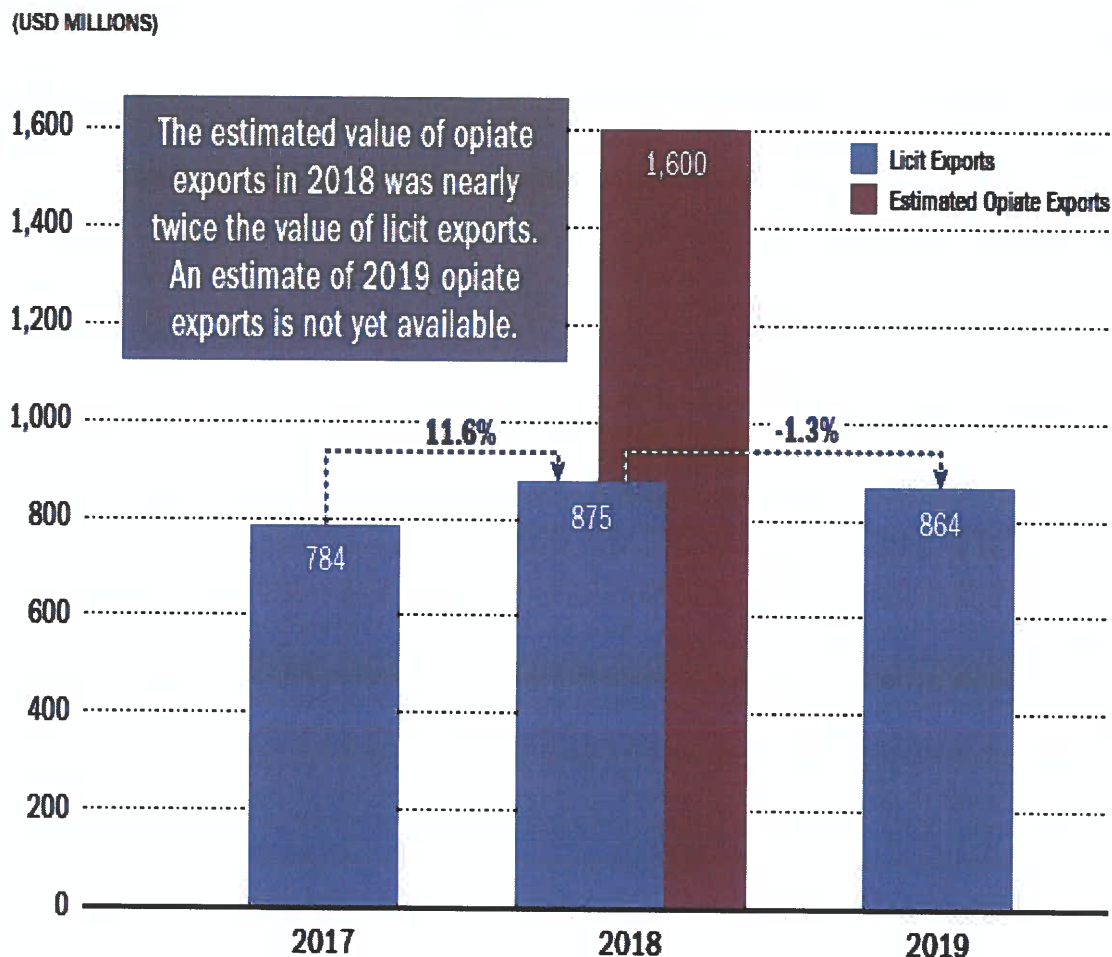
SIGAR's *Quarterly Report for January 1 - March 31, 2020* shows that the U.S. programs have lost virtually all of their funding, and reports, that the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) is not able to confirm, state claims made by the MOI's Deputy Minister for Counter Narcotics, Mohammad Hashim Urtaq, who issued a report on April 7, 2020. SIGAR also reports that INL states,²³⁹

“further reported that crop eradication has been on a long-term downward trend, in part due to opium-poppy cultivation in inaccessible or insecure areas. As of late February 2020, INL had no plans to provide direct financial support to MOI for crop eradication in 2020... According to INL, it was not planning to provide direct financial support because it cannot verify eradication performed under the MOI...”

It seems clear from other reporting that the U.S. has virtually given up on this effort. The LIG report for 1 January – 31 March 2020 states that, “the 2019 staffing review at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul reduced the number of DoS Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

(INL) direct hire and contract support personnel in Afghanistan by 87 percent. With fewer INL personnel and a largely unchanged work demand, INL reported that there were fewer hours available for oversight of INL programs and projects in Afghanistan.”²⁴⁰

Chart Twenty-One: Afghan Trade Relies on Staying a Narco-State: Afghan Legal Exports versus Estimate Opiate Exports in 2018

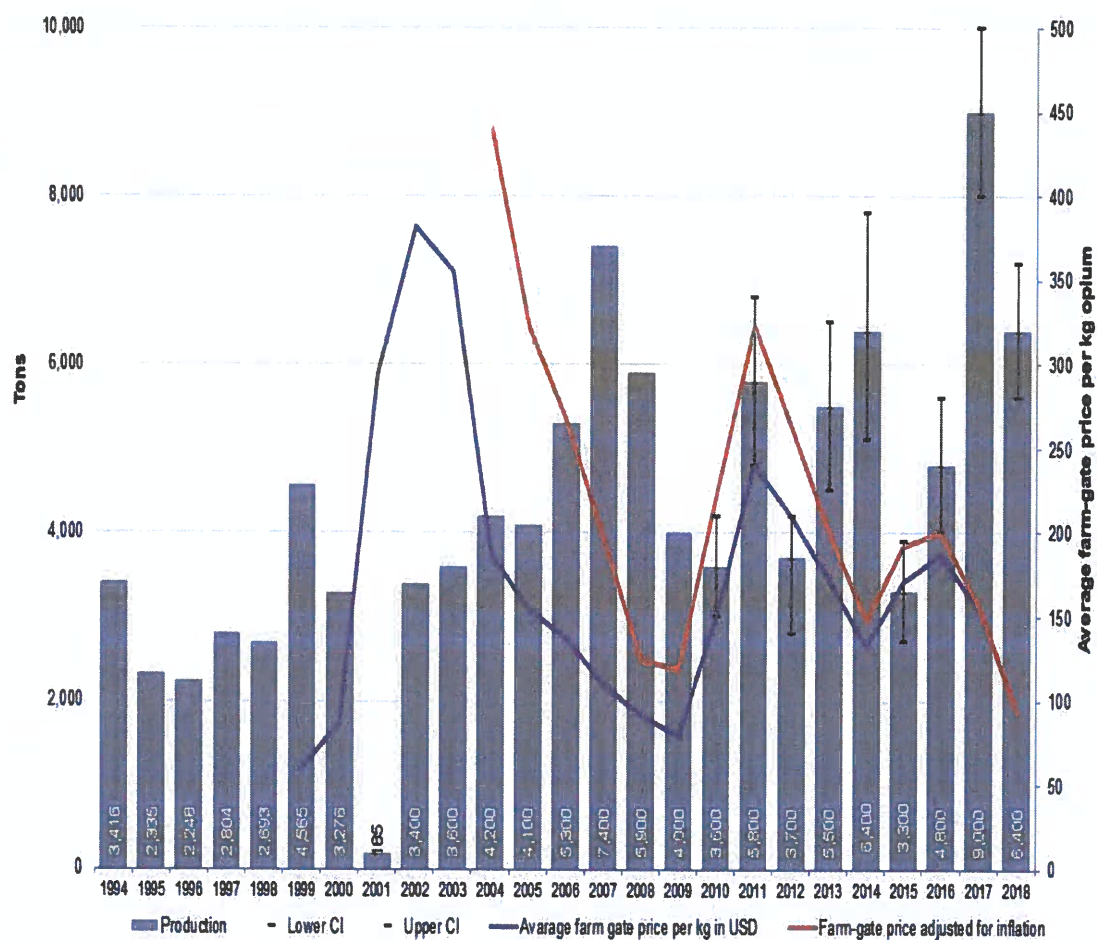


Note: The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) publishes authoritative annual estimates of opiate exports. The UNODC expresses that value as a range. The bar representing the estimated value of opiate exports in 2018 represents the midpoint (\$1.6 billion) of the 2018 range (\$1.1 billion–2.1 billion) reported by the UNODC. While the UNODC figure is technically the “value of opiates potentially available for export” rather than an estimate of the value of actual exports, it is the best figure available to express the comparison with licit exports. Notably, while the value of licit exports, denominated in afghanis, has gradually risen over the last several years, according to official figures, the estimated value of opiate exports is far more volatile. For example, in 2017, the value of opiates potentially available for export was \$4 billion–6.5 billion, according to the UNODC.

Source: SIGAR analysis of NSIA quarterly export data, 2017–2019, accessed 4/10/2020, 12/10/2019, 9/22/2019, 6/21/2019, 3/23/2019, 12/20/2018, and 9/25/2018; UNODC, Afghanistan opium survey 2018: Challenges to sustainable development, peace and security, 7/2019, p. 24; UNODC, Afghanistan opium survey 2017: Challenges to sustainable development, peace and security, 5/2018, p. 5.

Chart Twenty-Two: Opium Production in Afghanistan: 1999-2018

Farm-gate prices of dry opium at harvest time weighted by production and annual opium production, 1999-2018 (tons; US dollars per kilogram)



Source: UNDOC, *Opium Survey 2018*, p. 44.

Coronavirus Warnings

A range of sources highlight the growing impact of the Coronavirus on the Afghan economy and the peace process. The World Bank has made a preliminary review of the economic impact of the peace agreements and the Coronavirus in its April 2020 “overview” of the Afghan economy. Like many World Bank reports, much of the analysis is optimistic, but it still warns of the economic challenges that any effort to implement a peace plan will face:²⁴¹

Afghanistan’s economy grew by an estimated 2.9 percent in 2019, driven mainly by strong agricultural growth following recovery from drought, but lingering political uncertainty dampens private confidence and investment, with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan recording 3,403 civilian casualties in 2019, and more than 1.1 million Afghans internally displaced due to conflict. The surge in returns by an estimated 1.7 million documented and undocumented Afghan refugees during 2016-2017 remains a pressure on the country’s economy and institutions. Internal displacement and large-scale return within a difficult economic and security context pose risks to welfare for the displaced and for host communities.

... Substantial improvements in development outcomes have been observed in Afghanistan since 2001, particularly in expanded access to water, sanitation and electricity, education, and health services. Macroeconomic management remains strong, government revenues have grown consistently since 2014, and the government has engaged in an impressive range of business environment and public financial management reforms. Expanded access to health, education, and infrastructure has seen rapid improvements in outcomes, with Afghanistan catching up with other low-income countries against key development indicators. While progress has been uneven, increased access to services and infrastructure has driven huge development gains.²⁴²

At the same time, Afghanistan continues to experience insecurity and political uncertainty. Presidential elections were held in September 2019, but the outcome remains contested. Afghanistan’s economy has been hard-hit by the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, due to negative impacts on consumption, exports, and remittances. Conflict is ongoing, and 2019 was the sixth year in a row when civilian casualties in Afghanistan exceeded 10,000. The displacement crisis persists, driven by intensified government and Taliban operations in the context of political negotiations. The number of conflict-induced IDPs increased from 369,700 in 2018 to more than 400,000 in 2019. An additional 505,000 refugees returned to Afghanistan, mainly from Iran, during 2019.

Negotiations between the US and the Taliban have concluded by signing of the “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan” on February 29, 2020, but the process of a political settlement is only beginning. *Meanwhile, the duration and extent of continued international security support is being questioned.* Current international security and civilian grant support pledges are due to expire in 2020, creating uncertainty regarding future aid levels and the sustainability of security and development expenditures. This has fundamental implications for the economy, with growth and investment constrained by weak confidence.

Afghanistan’s economy is estimated to have grown by 2.9 percent in 2019 driven by easing of drought conditions and rapid agricultural growth. Inflation remained modest at 2.3 percent. *The trade deficit remains extremely large, at around 31 percent of GDP, financed mostly by grant inflows. Fiscal performance continued to improve in 2019 despite the elections with domestic revenues reaching 14.1 percent of GDP. Political uncertainties, however, dampened private sector confidence and non-agriculture growth. The basic needs poverty rate was 55 percent at the time of the last household survey (2016/17) and is expected to have worsened since due to declining per capita incomes.*

The economy is expected to contract by up to four percent in 2020 with the negative impacts of the COVID-19 virus overshadowing improvements in weather conditions. Additional substantial downside risks remain, including political instability, deterioration of security conditions, premature reduction in aid flows, and further adverse regional economic or political developments. Poverty is expected to remain high, driven by weak labor demand and security-related constraints on service delivery.

Short-term priorities include continued implementation of business environment and anti-corruption reforms to improve private sector confidence, mobilize investment, and ensure confidence of the international community. Over the medium-term, reform efforts should focus on attracting additional investment in the

agriculture and extractive sectors, which have the combined potential to deliver increased employment, exports, government revenues, and growth. To ensure that benefits of agriculture and extractives led growth are maximized and widely shared, continued investment is required in human capital, regional connectivity, expanded infrastructure, and an improved business regulatory environment.

The Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) *Quarterly Report* for the first quarter of 2020 has a special introductory section on the Coronavirus, which maps its rapid growth as it spread from Iran, and it notes the severe limits in Afghan health capabilities to deal with the virus.²⁴³ It warns that the peace process must proceed in spite of the Coronavirus crisis, which had then been identified in 29 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces as well as in all of the major populated areas controlled by the central government. The disease had forced the lockdown of many populated areas by March 14, 2020 – and Afghanistan was dealing with a flood of some 226,000 Afghans that had already come back from Iran.²⁴⁴

The Lead Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction's *Quarterly Report* for the same period also provided warnings about the uncertainties in the peace process, the impact of the Coronavirus, and the fact that the peace agreements were uncertain and have scarcely ended all of the fighting:²⁴⁵

Afghanistan could be severely affected by the outbreak, according to the international assistance community... Mercy Corps, a global humanitarian organization that partners with the U.S. Government in Afghanistan, assessed that the COVID-19 pandemic will place significant strain on the Afghan economy, overburden an already weak healthcare system, and potentially force millions of people deeper into poverty.⁴⁵ Without sufficient action, the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health estimated that 25.6 million Afghans would likely be infected with COVID-19 and 110,000 could die.²⁴⁶

... More than 200,000 Afghans returned from Iran this quarter, some because of the collapsing Iranian economy and others because of the COVID-19 outbreak there.... According to OCHA, Iran had 41,495 confirmed cases of the disease as of March 31, 2020... While flights to and from Iran were suspended, the border crossing at Herat remained open for individuals and commerce, and the border crossing at Nimroz remained open only for commerce and documented Afghans... The International Organization for Migration reported a surge in undocumented Afghans over a 2-week period in mid-March when a record 115,410 returned from Iran, although the large wave of returnees subsided in the following week... Overall, the number of returnees from Iran in the first 3 months of the year increased by 124 percent over the same time period in 2019 to approximately 215,400... According to media reports, health screening at the border was rudimentary for most returnees... On March 31, media reports stated that Afghanistan had reopened its border crossings with Iran to discourage returnees from entering the country through illegal routes...²⁴⁷

... Testing in Afghanistan had only occurred on a small scale, which may explain the relatively low number of confirmed cases, according to OCHA, in spite of the increase in the number of individuals crossing into Afghanistan from Iran.³²⁴ According to OCHA, the WHO supported the government of Afghanistan in establishing four testing facilities, two in Kabul, one in Herat, and one in Nangarhar province, with plans to begin operation at an additional testing facility in Mazar-i-Sharif in early April and increasing to 15 test facilities across the country by the end of April...²⁴⁸

Other reports indicated that Afghanistan had recorded 8,678 confirmed cases and 193 deaths as of May 21, 2020, and 32,672 cases and 826 deaths as of July 2, 2020, but these are almost certainly a major undercount. Afghanistan cannot collect or test for a meaningful estimate.²⁴⁹ With the already poor health of most of Afghan's population due to Afghanistan's lack of adequate healthcare infrastructure, the country is at a higher risk of spreading the disease. Furthermore, most Afghans depend on daily wages and cannot observe social distancing measures.

The central government and the Taliban must adjust to the significant setbacks that the Coronavirus crisis presents. Both entities are vying to provide an adequate response to the crisis. However, the Afghan government does not have the proper equipment to deal with the pandemic and multiple staff members of the presidential palace have already tested positive for COVID-19.

Meanwhile, the Taliban has deployed teams to hand out medical supplies, such as masks, gloves, and soap, in an attempt to promote its legitimacy. Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said, “We can’t completely stop our attacks... because [the government is] compelling [these attacks]. God forbid, if the virus spreads in the country, then we could stop fighting to control the situation.”²⁵⁰

As of June 2020, Afghan security officials from four provinces reported that 60% to 90% among their units are infected with the Coronavirus.²⁵¹ With inadequate testing abilities, the Afghan central government cannot really assess the number of actual infections. This does not, however, affect the ongoing spread of the virus, and the virus had clearly resulted in a dwindling number of deployable Afghan forces.

The Coronavirus has also had an effect on the peace negotiations. On June 1, 2020, *Foreign Policy* reported that the current Emir Mullah Haibatullah Akhunzada was facing serious health conditions after being infected with the virus, and it was also reported that Sirajuddin Haqqani, who is in charge of the Taliban’s militant offshoot, caught COVID-19 as well.²⁵² The second military deputy and son of former Mullah Mohammed Omar, Yaqoob Omar, has taken the roles of administrative, operational, and military leadership. His consolidated command may only lead to his inevitable prominence as a spiritual leader, and he may resume the prominence his father held in the Taliban’s structure. The Coronavirus may effectively be shaping the leadership of the Taliban, but only time will tell.

Barriers to Doing Business and creating an Effective Private Sector

Moreover, the Afghan government also still imposes numerous barriers to the development of its private sector. As **Chart Twenty** shows, the World Bank indicates that Afghanistan has the 17th worst “Ease of Doing Business” ranking in the world.

These are critical issues, given the low effectiveness of the Afghan government; the central government’s corruption; and the problems that will arise in dealing with the conflicting objectives of the central government, Taliban, and various power brokers if a peace is actually achieved. Token aid programs cannot create the momentum behind the major and consistent expansion of private sector financing and enterprise that Afghanistan needs.

The Cost of Peace and A New Taliban Threat

These economic data do more than reflect the economic challenges to Afghan development and any form of stable peace. They show that creating a working peace will require a major restructuring of how Afghan governance deals with the economy, a far more effective approach to development, an agreement between two radically opposed ideological approaches to economics, an exceptional dependence on outside aid at a time when donor countries face major strains on their spending, and an almost immediate implementation of a comprehensive development and reform plan that both the factions within the central government and the Taliban will support.

Moreover, Taliban support of a modern economy is a critical issue. Afghanistan’s population growth alone means that the Taliban’s ideology will become a critical economic issue. Will the Taliban support a modern economy in a world with little tolerance for ideologies that prevent effective competition for investment, economic growth, and trade?

The present peace process is in danger of falling apart by ignoring the fact that the Taliban has become a Mafia-like structure in terms of its real-world financing while still pursuing an ideology that calls for it to live in a neo-Salafi past that never really existed. If a peace is implemented, the

Taliban have no real plans or goals for a workable economic future. The UN reports that the Taliban's "economy" is not only based on drugs, but upon extortion and the creation of smuggling networks that now control large portions of the trade into Central Asia and Pakistan:²⁵³

Estimates by Member States and others of overall Taliban annual combined revenues range from \$300 million to upwards of \$1.5 billion per annum. While officials noted lower figures for 2019, they were careful to note that the Taliban used resources effectively and efficiently and were not experiencing a cash crisis. Lower sums were assessed to be the result of a combination of factors: reduction in poppy cultivation and revenue, less taxable income from aid and development projects, and increased spending on "governance" projects.

The group was thought to be expanding revenue streams through increased road taxation fees, now possible as the Taliban have expanded control over highways and many road networks in the north of Afghanistan. *Ushr* and *zakat* taxation has also increased in areas controlled by the Taliban close to urban populations. In addition, the retaking of large poppy-cultivating areas in Nangarhar was expected to counter financial losses incurred as a result of Afghan Forces regaining control over certain mineral mines in Badakhshan Province. Overall, the Taliban are currently able to levy taxes on almost all infrastructure, utilities, agriculture and social industry in areas under their control or influence. The Taliban have conducted notable extortion campaigns during the past year against mobile telephone providers and electrical supply companies.

... Interlocutors in the north-east of Afghanistan highlighted the role played by Tajik criminal networks in facilitating the movement of narcotics from Afghanistan into Central Asia ... Officials described a system of heroin smuggling and taxation organized by the Taliban that stretched across eight of Nangarhar's southern districts from Hisarak to Dur Baba, on the border with Pakistan...

Adding the Taliban to the many problems created by a corrupt and inadequate central government is yet another major challenge to a stable peace. And, a peace that makes the reform of Afghan governance and the Afghan economy even less probable or will come at an immense price to both the nation and its people.

Chart Twenty-Three: Afghanistan's Dismal Performance in the World Bank Ease of Business Rating

TABLE O.1 Ease of doing business ranking

Rank	Economy	DB score	Rank	Economy	DB score	Rank	Economy	DB score
1	New Zealand	86.8	65	Puerto Rico (U.S.)	70.1	128	Barbados	57.9
2	Singapore	86.2	66	Brunei Darussalam	70.1	129	Ecuador	57.7
3	Hong Kong SAR, China	85.3	67	Colombia	70.1	130	St. Vincent and the Grenadines	57.1
4	Denmark	85.3	68	Oman	70.0	131	Nigeria	56.9
5	Korea, Rep.	84.0	69	Uzbekistan	69.9	132	Niger	56.8
6	United States	84.0	70	Vietnam	69.8	133	Honduras	56.3
7	Georgia	83.7	71	Jamaica	69.7	134	Guyana	55.5
8	United Kingdom	83.5	72	Luxembourg	69.6	135	Belize	55.5
9	Norway	82.6	73	Indonesia	69.6	136	Solomon Islands	55.3
10	Sweden	82.0	74	Costa Rica	69.2	137	Cabo Verde	55.0
11	Lithuania	81.6	75	Jordan	69.0	138	Mozambique	55.0
12	Malaysia	81.5	76	Peru	68.7	139	St. Kitts and Nevis	54.6
13	Mauritius	81.5	77	Qatar	68.7	140	Zimbabwe	54.5
14	Australia	81.2	78	Tunisia	68.7	141	Tanzania	54.5
15	Taiwan, China	80.9	79	Greece	68.4	142	Nicaragua	54.4
16	United Arab Emirates	80.9	80	Kyrgyz Republic	67.8	143	Lebanon	54.3
17	North Macedonia	80.7	81	Mongolia	67.8	144	Cambodia	53.8
18	Estonia	80.6	82	Albania	67.7	145	Palau	53.7
19	Latvia	80.3	83	Kuwait	67.4	146	Grenada	53.4
20	Finland	80.2	84	South Africa	67.0	147	Maldives	53.3
21	Thailand	80.1	85	Zambia	66.9	148	Mali	52.9
22	Germany	79.7	86	Panama	66.6	149	Benin	52.4
23	Canada	79.6	87	Botswana	66.2	150	Bolivia	51.7
24	Ireland	79.6	88	Malta	66.1	151	Burkina Faso	51.4
25	Kazakhstan	79.6	89	Bhutan	66.0	152	Mauritania	51.1
26	Iceland	79.0	90	Bosnia and Herzegovina	65.4	153	Marshall Islands	50.9
27	Austria	78.7	91	El Salvador	65.3	154	Lao PDR	50.8
28	Russian Federation	78.2	92	San Marino	64.2	155	Gambia, The	50.3
29	Japan	78.0	93	St. Lucia	63.7	156	Guinea	49.4
30	Spain	77.9	94	Nepal	63.2	157	Algeria	48.6
31	China	77.9	95	Philippines	62.8	158	Micronesia, Fed. Sts.	48.1
32	France	76.8	96	Guatemala	62.6	159	Ethiopia	48.0
33	Turkey	76.8	97	Togo	62.3	160	Comoros	47.9
34	Azerbaijan	76.7	98	Samoa	62.1	161	Madagascar	47.7
35	Israel	76.7	99	Sri Lanka	61.8	162	Suriname	47.5
36	Switzerland	76.6	100	Seychelles	61.7	163	Sierra Leone	47.5
37	Slovenia	76.5	101	Uruguay	61.5	164	Kiribati	46.9
38	Rwanda	76.5	102	Fiji	61.5	165	Myanmar	46.8
39	Portugal	76.5	103	Tonga	61.4	166	Burundi	46.8
40	Poland	76.4	104	Namibia	61.4	167	Cameroon	46.1
41	Czech Republic	76.3	105	Trinidad and Tobago	61.3	168	Bangladesh	45.0
42	Netherlands	76.1	106	Tajikistan	61.3	169	Gabon	45.0
43	Bahrain	76.0	107	Vanuatu	61.1	170	São Tomé and Príncipe	45.0
44	Serbia	75.7	108	Pakistan	61.0	171	Sudan	44.8
45	Slovak Republic	75.6	109	Malawi	60.9	172	Iraq	44.7
46	Belgium	75.0	110	Côte d'Ivoire	60.8	173	Afghanistan	44.1
47	Armenia	74.5	111	Dominica	60.7	174	Guinea-Bissau	43.2
48	Moldova	74.4	112	Djibouti	60.7	175	Liberia	43.2
49	Belarus	74.3	113	Antigua and Barbuda	60.7	176	Syrian Arab Republic	42.0
50	Montenegro	73.8	114	Egypt, Arab Rep.	60.7	177	Angola	41.3
51	Croatia	73.6	115	Dominican Republic	60.0	178	Equatorial Guinea	41.1
52	Hungary	73.4	116	Uganda	60.0	179	Haiti	40.7
53	Morocco	73.4	117	West Bank and Gaza	60.0	180	Congo, Rep.	39.5
54	Cyprus	73.4	118	Ghana	60.0	181	Timor-Leste	39.4
55	Romania	73.3	119	Bahamas, The	59.9	182	Chad	36.9
56	Kenya	73.2	120	Papua New Guinea	59.8	183	Congo, Dem. Rep.	36.2
57	Kosovo	73.2	121	Eswatini	59.5	184	Central African Republic	35.6
58	Italy	72.9	122	Lesotho	59.4	185	South Sudan	34.6
59	Chile	72.6	123	Senegal	59.3	186	Libya	32.7
60	Mexico	72.4	124	Brazil	59.1	187	Yemen, Rep.	31.8
61	Bulgaria	72.0	125	Paraguay	59.1	188	Venezuela, RB	30.2
62	Saudi Arabia	71.6	126	Argentina	59.0	189	Eritrea	21.6
63	India	71.0	127	Iran, Islamic Rep.	58.5	190	Somalia	20.0
64	Ukraine	70.2						

Source: Doing Business database.

Note: The rankings are benchmarked to May 1, 2019, and based on the average of each economy's ease of doing business scores for the 10 topics included in the aggregate ranking. For the economies for which the data cover two cities, scores are a population-weighted average for the two cities. Rankings are calculated on the basis of the unrounded scores, while scores with only one digit are displayed in the table.

World Bank, *Doing Business 2020 : Comparing Business Regulation in 190 Economies*, p. 104,
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/32436>. Lists no reforms or progress in 2020 report.

Strategic Triage: Supporting a Peace or Writing Off a Failed Security Partner?

This analysis warns of many possible problems in the Afghan peace process and that such peace efforts often fail – even after a peace seems to be in place. At least half of these problems are created by the divisions and failures of the Afghan central government. They range from military, financial, and governance problems to a self-seeking political structure that is divided against itself, power hungry, and often has a character more suited to a kleptocracy than the needs of its people.

At the same time, both the United States and the Afghan government are now negotiating on the basis that the Taliban will be willing to share power for the sake of peace in Afghanistan, but these assumptions may well be false.

The Taliban's ongoing violence and its statements indicate that it has not changed its ideology or goals, and its preoccupation with prisoner releases should raise some red flags. Not only did the Taliban leverage the rate it carried out attacks to encourage the prisoner release, it only came back to the negotiating table when the Afghan government would release more prisoners.²⁵⁴ As the Taliban is reunited with its leaders who were formerly imprisoned, their willingness to compromise on their ideology with the central government may devolve into another reinvigorated campaign against the West.

If Afghanistan cannot move forward, this analysis warns that it is time for some grim decisions. It is one thing to help a country that helps itself, it is quite another thing to attempt to waste resources in trying to protect a state that suffers from so many self-inflicted wounds that it cannot move forward or use aid effectively.

Strategic triage is an unpleasant exercise at best – and the Afghan people deserve far more than their present government and warring leaders provide – but the United States now operates in a world where hard choices need to be made and one where many alternative countries and real strategic partners have shown that they can use aid effectively to help themselves.

No one can easily write off a nation because of its current sets of problems or the failures of its current leaders. If Afghanistan can move towards solutions to enough of these problems so that it can actually create a credible springboard for a lasting peace, it will be worth the cost of continuing U.S. support – particularly if a viable peace option can be developed

But, the United States may well have to choose between getting out without a real peace and staying indefinitely in country without an effective central government – a country that is slowly losing the war and is also facing a massive economic crisis. If the United States does stay in Afghanistan under these conditions, it will be backing a government that will be indefinitely dependent on outside aid. It will also be backing one whose strategic value has declined from being the center of international al Qaeda terrorist activity to being just one more center of extremist violence in a world where many other such countries can be similar potential sites for such terrorist activity.

The U.S. will also be spending resources on Afghanistan that would have more humanitarian and strategic value if they went to countries that could help themselves, that had lower levels of corruption and waste, and had a government that actually served the interests of its people. Quite aside from the selfish merits of a “realist approach” to security, the grim reality in granting aid and

military support is that every form of humanitarian and security aid involves tradeoffs in resources that benefit one nation at the expense of another. This is even more true in the Covid-19 period than in the past. Nations already at peace that have proven to be strategic partners will need aid, and “triage” in aid will be just as important as “triage” in allocating military forces and choosing a strategy.

Moreover, the choices involved for the United States in making decisions about strategic triage need to be regional as well as national. It is one thing to work with a valid strategic partner where U.S. military and civil aid can provide regional advantages as well as offer limited advantages to a given partner country. In Afghanistan’s case, however, the U.S. has many higher priorities outside Central Asia, and it has every reason to burden many of Afghanistan’s neighbor with the problems created by its status as a failed state and central of regional instability. The United States might actually gain far more by focusing on other regions and by leaving neighbors like Russia, China, Iran, and Pakistan with the problem of dealing with Afghanistan on their own.

Additional data on the problems in the Afghan politics, governance, security, and economics are available in another Burke Chair report, *Afghanistan at Peace or Afghanistan in Pieces – Part One: The First Phase*.²⁵⁵

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⁶ Lead Inspector General (LIG), *Quarterly Report to Congress on Operation Freedom's Sentinel, January 1, 2020-March 31, 2020*, p. 2-3, May 19, 2020, <https://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/2191020/lead-inspector-general-for-operation-freedoms-sentinel-i-quarterly-report-to-th/>.

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¹⁸ *Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan*, Report to Congress in Accordance with Section 1225 of the National Defense Authorization Act, June 2020, pp. 1-2.

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