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EASO Country of Origin Information Report

Afghanistan

Security Situation

November 2016

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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2012) ([1]). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced. As much as possible, and unless otherwise stated, all information presented, except for undisputed or obvious facts, has been cross-checked.

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

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position. Refugee, risk and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not as legally defined in the EU asylum *acquis* and the Geneva Convention.

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The target users are asylum caseworkers, COI researchers, policymakers, and decisionmaking authorities.

The drafting of this report was finalised in August 2016. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the introduction.

([1]) The EASO methodology is largely based on the Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI), 2008, and can be downloaded from the EASO website: http://www.easo.eu.

Glossary and Abbreviations

AAN	**Afghanistan Analysts Network**
ACSO	**Afghanistan Central Statistics Office**
AFP	**Agence France-Presse**
AGCHO	**Afghan Geodesy and Cartography Head Office**
AGEs	**Anti-Government Elements** are armed opposition fighters, or insurgents, who are fighting against the Afghan government and its international allies. Examples of such groups of fighters are the Taliban, the Haqqani network and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan ([2]).
AIHRC	**Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission**
AIMS	**Afghanistan Information Management System**
Amir-ul-Momineen	Leader of the Faithfull, the highest Islamic ruler who canclaim legitimacy from the community of Muslims ([3])
ANAP	**Afghan National Auxiliary Police**
ANSF ([4])	**Afghan National Security Forces:** The Afghan government's official armed forces, composed of: **ANA (Afghan National Army)**: The internationally trained Afghan army (2002); **AAF (Afghan Airforce)** **ANP (Afghan National Police)**: Afghanistan's police force, with the following subdivisions: **AACP (Afghan Anti-Crime Police) and ALP (Afghan Local Police)** are security initiatives under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior, funded by the US ([5]). **ANBP (Afghan National Border Police)** **ANCOP (Afghan National Civil Order Police)** **AUP (Afghan Uniformed Police)** **CNPA (Counter-Narcotics Police of Afghanistan)** **NDS (National Directorate of Security)**: The intelligence service of the Afghan government.
APPF	**Afghanistan Public Protection Force**
APPRO	**Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation**
Arbaki	A centuries-old tribal security system. Contrary to militias, members of the Arbaki are tribesman hailing from well identified villages and specific tribes. ([6])

([2]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014, p. 75.

([3]) Dawn, Analysis: Battle for 'Ameer-ul-Momineen', updated on: 6 December 2014.

([4]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014, p. 75.

([5]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014, p. 46.

([6]) Seraj, A., The Arbaki can secure Afghanistan better than the US, 5 November 2014.

AXO	**Abandoned explosive ordnance** is an explosive ordnance that has not been used during an armed conflict, that has been left behind or dumped by a party to an armed conflict, and which is no longer under the latter's control. Abandoned explosive ordnance may or may not have been primed, fused, armed or otherwise prepared for use (Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons Protocol V) ([7]).
Azm	Taliban spring offensive
Bacha Baazi	Dancing boys: Young boys who dance and are often sexually abused. This practice is often associated with powerful men.
Buzkashi	is an ancient game that is still played in Afghanistan. Horsemen play a sort of polo with a goat's carcass: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_UB3eA8B4qI).
CAO	**Central Asia Online**
CDF	**Community Defence Forces**
CMFC	**Civil-Military Fusion Centre**
CIP	**Critical Infrastructure Program:** predecessor of the Afghan Local Police (ALP)
Civilian	UNAMA refers to international law for a definition of 'civilians': persons who are not combatants or otherwise taking part in the conflict (not members of military/ paramilitary forces or fighters of organised armed groups of a party to a conflict or those who are not part of a mass uprising) ([8]).
COMISAF	The Commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.
Complex attack	A deliberate and coordinated attack that includes a suicide device (i.e. BBIED, VBIED), more than one attacker and more than one type of device (i.e. BBIED + mortars). All three elements must be used for an attack to be considered complex ([9]).
CPAU	**Cooperation for Peace and Unity**
ERW	**Explosive Remnants of War:** These are **unexploded ordnances (UXOs)** and **abandoned explosive ordnances (AXOs)** ([10]).
Escalation of Force	refers to incidents, or "force protection" incidents, involving the use of lethal or non-lethal force by military personnel when civilians ignore, do not understand, or do not see warnings from military personnel in approaching or overtaking military convoys, or in circumstances where civilians do not follow instructions at military checkpoints ([11]).
Ground engagements	include kinetic ground operations, stand-off attacks, crossfire and armed clashes between parties to the conflict. Ground engagements include attacks or operations in which small arms, heavy weapons and/or area weapons systems, i.e. mortars and rockets are fired ([12]).
Haqqani network	An armed insurgent movement under the leadership of Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Sirajuddin. The headquarters and base are in North Waziristan (Pakistan) and South-East Afghanistan, in areas of the Pashtun tribe of the Zadran.

([7]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014, p. 76.

([8]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014, pp. 74 and 76.

([9]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014, p. 19.

([10]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014, p. 66.

([11]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014, p. 45.

([12]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014, p. 77.

HIA (Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan)	An armed insurgent movement under the leadership of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, with strongholds in the East, North-East, South-East and Centre of Afghanistan.
HRW	**Human Rights Watch**
IDP	**Internally Displaced Person**
IEC	**Independent Election Commission**
IED	**Improvised Explosive Device:** usually a self-made bomb. It is used in asymmetric warfare. Variants are ([13]): **BBIED (Body Borne Improvised Explosive Device)**, or suicide bomb, is usually a self-made explosive device worn on the body of the attacker. It is commonly held in a vest, but also, for example, concealed in a turban. **MIED (Magnetic Improvised Explosive Device)** is an IED with a magnet, allowing it to be attached quickly and easily to objects such as a vehicle. **PPIED (Pressure-Plate IED)** is an IED that is detonated when the victim steps on a pressure-plate. **RCIED (Radio or Remote-Controlled Improvised Explosive Device)** is an IED that can be detonated by remote control. Users can aim at a specific target passing the location of the IED and detonate from a distance. **VBIED (Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device)**, or car bomb, is usually a self-made explosive device placed in a car that is driven towards a target or parked at the target location. **VOIED (Victim-operated IED)** detonates when a person or vehicle triggers the initiator or switch, such as a pressure plate or pressure-release mechanism, trip wire or another device, resulting in an explosion.
IMF	**International military forces**
IMU	**Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan:** An armed insurgent movement operating in Afghanistan and other countries with many fighters who fled government repression in Uzbekistan.
Indirect fire	Indirect fire weapons, such as mortars, rockets and grenades are highly explosive weapons systems which fire projectiles to a location without a direct line of visibility to the target. Mortars cannot be guided to hit a specific target and have a wide area of impact; when used in civilian-populated areas the risk of civilian casualties is very high (UNAMA definition).
IS, ISK	**Islamic State**, also called ISIS, ISIL or Daesh. Islamic State in Afghanistan is also called ISK (Islamic State Khorasan Province), or Islamic State Levant-Khorasan Province (ISL-KP)
ISAF	**International Security Assistance Force:** An international military coalition based on the NATO alliance. Until 31 December 2014, it supported the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in its efforts to secure and stabilise the country (http://www.isaf.nato.int/). It was replaced by Resolute Support.
ISW	**Institute for the Study of War**
IWPR	**Institute for War & Peace Reporting**

([13]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014, p. 77.

Jihad	This is a term derived from an Arabic root meaning "to struggle" or "to strive". It has different meanings but in this report refers to "armed struggle of Islamic insurgents against the Afghan government and their (inter-)national allies".
Jihadi	The insurgency against the communist regime and Soviet occupation was called a *jihad* and fighters or commanders from the period (1979-1989) are still today often referred to as jihadi (commanders).
KIA	**Kabul International Airport**
LDI	**Local Defense Initiative**
LeI	**Lashkar-e Islami:** A militant sectarian group formed in 2004 under Mufti Shakir in Khyber Agency in Pakistan ([14]). On March 12, 2015, Lashkar-e-Islam announced that it was joining Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan ([15]).
LeJ	**Lashkar-e Jhangvi:** A violent, anti-Shiite – itself being Sunnite – militant group in Pakistan, formed in 1995. It has carried out a number of attacks on minority groups in Pakistan with the aim of establishing Pakistan as an orthodox Deobandi state ([16]).
LeT	**Lashkar-e Taiba:** A Sunni militant group, which follows the Ahl-e-Hadith interpretation of Islam (which means it regards Quran, Sunnah and Hadith as the sole source of religious authority and rejects the different schools of thought within Islamic jurisprudence, as well as Taqlid and Ijtihad). LeT was formed in 1990 and initially trained in the Kunar Province of Afghanistan. It is now based near Lahore in Pakistan. LeT's declared goals include conducting jihad in the way of Allah, preaching the true religion and educating a new generation along true Islamic lines. It aligns its ideological goals with the interests of the Pakistani state by fighting for unification of the Kashmir region and its integration into Pakistani territory using violence. It aims to change the regional and geopolitical dynamic of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India by attacking civilian targets ([17]).
Mawlawi	is an honorific title given to a scholar who completed Islamic studies in a madrassa.
MoD	**Ministry of Defence**
MoHE	**Ministry of Higher Education**
MoI	**Ministry of the Interior**
MRRD	**Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development**
Mujahideen	Islamic holy warriors. The term dates back to the 1980s, when Islamic fighting groups opposed the communist regime and the military forces of the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan.
NGO	**Non-Governmental Organisation**
NUG	**National Unity Government,** installed following the 2014 presidential elections. The NUG is led by President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah.
OSI	**Open Society Institute**
PC	**Provincial Council**
PGM	**Pro-Government Militia**
PPS	**Presidential Protection Service**
PRT	**Provincial Reconstruction Teams**
PSD	**Protection Status Determination**

([14]) Stanford University, 'Lashkar-e-Islam', Mapping Militant Organizations, updated on: 28 August 2012.

([15]) Reuters, Pakistani splinter group rejoins Taliban amid fears of isolation, 12 March 2015; Roggio, B., Pakistani jihadist groups, Lashkar-i-Islam merge into the Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan, 12 March 2015.

([16]) Stanford University, 'Lashkar-e-Jhangvi', updated on: 3 August 2012.

([17]) Stanford University, 'Lashkar-e-Taiba', updated on: 3 August 2012.

Resolute Support	As of 1 January 2015, this new non-combat mission with a focus on training, advising and assisting ANSF, is the successor of ISAF.
RFE/RL	**Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty**
RPG	**Rocket Propelled Grenade**
RRERS	**Regional Rural Economic Regeneration Strategies**
SAF	**Small Arms Fire**
Shura	Community council
Taliban	An armed Islamic insurgent movement in Afghanistan under the leadership of Haibatullah Akhunzada (following Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, leader of the Taliban from July 2015 to May 2016, who had succeeded Mullah Mohammed Omar, long-time leader of the Taliban, deceased in April 2013, but whose death was only officially announced two years later in 2015) and the Leadership Shura in the Pakistani city of Quetta. The movement originated in the Mujahideen era (1980s and 90s), took control of Kabul in 1996 and, by 2001, controlled most of the country.
Tora Bora Military Front	was formed in 2007 by the son of the legendary mujahideen commander Younus Khalis. The group conducted attacks against Afghan and foreign forces in Nangarhar and has its stronghold in the district of Khogyani, and in the areas of Pachir Agam and Shinwar ([18]).
TTP (Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan)	This is the largest militant group in Pakistan. The organisation was founded on 13 December 2007 in a meeting of tribal elders and 40 senior militants throughout Pakistan. Baitullah Mehsud was appointed the commander of TTP. TTP had pledged allegiance to Mullah Omar, at that time the leader of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The main goal behind TTP's establishment was to unite the various factions of the Pakistan Taliban in order to organise synchronised attacks on NATO/ISAF forces in Afghanistan. The group also carries out "defensive jihad" against Pakistani military forces conducting operations in FATA ([19]).
UAV	**Unmanned Aerial Vehicle** (drone)
UNAMA	**United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan**
UNDP	**United Nations Development Programme**
UNGASC	**United Nations General Assembly Security Council**
UNHCR	**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**
UNOCHA	**United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**
USACAC	**United States Army Combined Arms Center**
Ushr	is an Islamic tax (normally 10%) on certain products, for example agricultural products.
USIP	**United States Institute of Peace**
WFP	**World Food Programme**
Zakat	is the religious duty in Islam comparable to almsgiving. As its rules are clearly laid down it is as well comparable to a tax on assets and liquidity (2.5%). The practice of almsgiving or Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam.

([18]) EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Afghanistan, Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 24.

([19]) Stanford University, 'Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan', updated on: 7 August 2012.

Introduction

This report was drafted by Country of Origin Information (COI) specialists from the COI units and asylum offices listed as authors under the Acknowledgements section.

The report aims to provide information on the security situation in Afghanistan, which is relevant for international protection status determination (PSD; refugee status and subsidiary protection). The terms of reference can be found in Annex 2.

Methodology

This report is an update of the EASO COI report "Afghanistan Security Situation" first published in January 2015, and updated in January 2016 ([20]).

• Defining the terms of reference ([21])

In 2014, through its work with Member States (MS), EASO identified the need among MS for detailed security updates supporting decision- and policy-makers in the assessment of the need for refugee protection and subsidiary protection, especially taking into account article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive (QD). This, together with article 2(f) QD, defines a number of key elements such as: a "real risk of serious harm"; an "internal or international armed conflict"; "indiscriminate violence"; the term "civilian"; and a "serious and individual threat to life or person".

Based on various sources consulted by EASO ([22]), these key elements can be broken down into topics and/or indicators. Examples include: parties to the conflict; intensity level of the violence; nature of the violence; regional spreading of the violence; targets of the violence; risk of collateral damage; use of arms and tactics; possibility to reach areas – security of transport (roads and airports); and indirect effects of the violence/conflict.

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

Members of the EASO COI Specialist Network on Afghanistan and UNHCR gave input on the terms of reference that were finalised by the co-authors in September 2014 taking all the inputs into account. In March 2015, EASO held a practical cooperation meeting on Afghanistan in Brussels, in which the participating EU+ countries ([23]) gave feedback on the first version of this report.

• Collecting information

This report presents information until 31 August 2016. A limited number of specialised paper-based and electronic sources were consulted.

A number of contact persons were interviewed. For security reasons, not all contacts were named; the choice had to be made between not interviewing them at all and referring to them as "anonymous sources". Considering the value of the information provided, the latter approach was preferred.

In particular, one source was used as a standard for quantitative data on security incidents. A Western security official ([24]), who cannot be named, provided data on security incidents on a level of detail, per district, not available via any public source. EASO produced tables based on these data, which can be found in the provincial parts of this

([20]) EASO COI reports are available via EASO's website: (http://easo.europa.eu/asylum-documentation/easo-publication-and-documentation/).

([21]) See annex 2.

([22]) The elements, topics and indicators were identified by various sources that have a different position in the legal hierarchy and provide different levels of detail: The Qualification Directive (Recitals and articles); Case law from the Court of Justice of the EU in Luxembourg; National State Practice (National legislation; National case law; National policy and first instance decision practice); Case law from the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg; Opinions of experts, academics and specialised organisations; See the following EASO publications: EASO, *Article 15(c) Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU) A judicial analysis*, December 2014 (https://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/Article-15c-Qualification-Directive-201195EU-A-judicial-analysis.pdf); The Implementation of Article 15(c) QD in EU Member States, July 2015 (https://easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/EASO_The-Implementation-of-Art-15c-QD-in-EU-Member-States.pdf).

([23]) EU+ countries are the EU Member States plus the associated countries Norway and Switzerland.

([24]) Throughout the report referred to as :

Western security official, anonymous source specialised in security in Afghanistan, emails and briefing, July 2015 – July 2016.

report. The source has been assessed as highly reliable and as using a detailed and appropriate methodology for the collection of data on security incidents in conflict zones. The number and type of security incidents is an important indicator in the terms of reference of this report (see Annex 2) and is potentially very useful for the assessment of the situation in the different provinces and districts of Afghanistan. The information provided by the source is in line with trends or information provided by other (public) sources. For these reasons, the choice was made to use this anonymous source. However, the statistics provided by the source should not be used as conclusive for the assessment of the protection needs, but can be taken as indicative of security trends when read together with other indicators and information in this report.

The data are presented in tables in every provincial subchapter. The categories of violent incidents include several types of incidents, for example:

— Violent incidents targeting individuals: kidnapping, targeted killing, intimidation, harassment…

— Explosions: IED detonations, suicide bombings…

— Non-conflict related violent incidents: criminal activities, drug trade…

— Security enforcement: arrests, weapons caches…

Where deemed relevant, information has been sourced from the Taliban's English websites ([25]). While Taliban reports on casualties inflicted on the enemy or military equipment seized are probably exaggerated, they have proven to be fairly accurate concerning territorial gains ([26]) and provide valuable information concerning their own command structure. It should be noted that Western or Afghan media reports on casualties inflicted on AGEs and regained control over district centres are often not accurate or exaggerated ([27]).

• Quality control

In order to ensure that the authors respected the EASO COI Report Methodology, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the Acknowledgements section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report.

Structure and use of this report

This report provides information on elements and indicators that may help in assessing the need for protection. It is not meant to be read as a whole. In the first part a general description is given on the security situation in Afghanistan and regional differences are highlighted. These are then explained in greater detail in the second part, holding a regional description of geographic subdivisions (Kabul City and 34 provinces).

The provincial parts have a different structure than in the previous reports. A general description of the province contains information on the geography and population, on the background of the conflict, including the actors active in the province. A second part describes recent trends in the security situation, including the nature of the violence, frequency, targets, locations, and victims within a timeframe from 1 September 2015 until 31 August 2016. Finally, a separate part is dedicated to displacements.

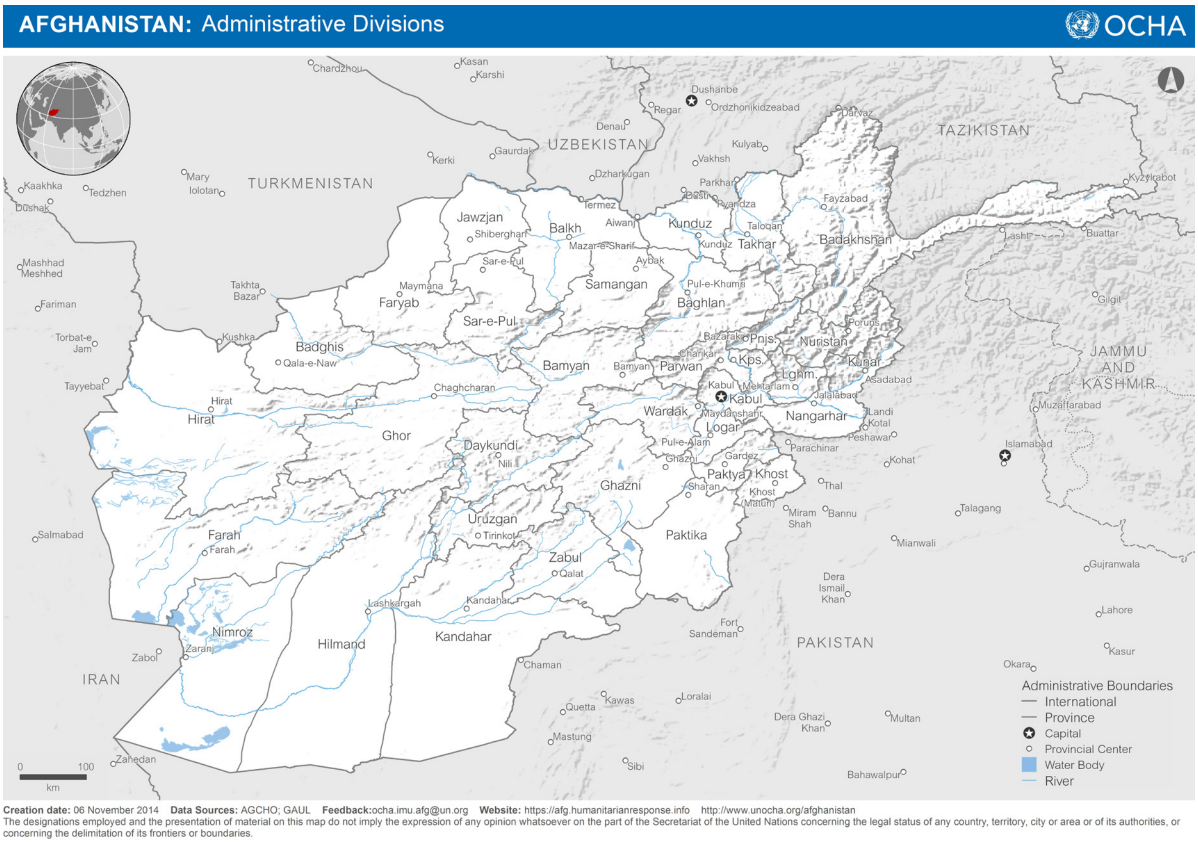
Both parts, the general and regional description, provide information from various sources on the relevant elements and indicators. Information on an indicator as such should never be taken as conclusive but as indicative for protection assessment and is to be read together with all other indicators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

([25]) http://shahamat-english.com/; http://alemarah-english.com/.

([26]) See also: Roggio, B., Taliban claims it seized 3 districts in Takhar province, 29 September 2015; Bernatis, V., 'The Taliban and Twitter: Tactical Reporting and Strategic Messaging', 2014.

([27]) Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015.

Map of Afghanistan



Map 1: Afghanistan - administrative divisions, source: UN OCHA

1. General description of the security situation in Afghanistan

The security situation will be described in this report using the following administrative divisions:

- Centre: Kabul; Kapisa; Panjshir; Parwan; Wardak; Logar;
- Central Highlands: Bamyan; Daykundi;
- South: Nimroz; Helmand; Kandahar; Uruzgan; Zabul;
- South-East: Ghazni; Paktika; Paktya; Khost;
- East: Nangarhar; Laghman; Kunar; Nuristan;
- North-East: Baghlan; Kunduz; Takhar; Badakhshan;
- North: Faryab; Jawzjan; Sar-e Pul; Balkh; Samangan;
- West: Herat; Badghis; Ghor; Farah.

The general security situation in Afghanistan is mainly determined by the following four factors: The main factor is the conflict between the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), supported by the International Military Forces (IMF), and Anti-Government Elements (AGEs), or insurgents. This conflict is often described as an "insurgency". The other factors are: criminality, warlordism and tribal tensions. These factors are often inter-linked and hard to distinguish ([28]). Several sources consider the situation in Afghanistan to be a non-international armed conflict ([29]).

The UN stated in June 2016 that ([30]):

> 'The security situation was characterized by continued and intense armed clashes, which were at their highest number recorded since 2001 and had a corresponding negative impact on civilians, with rising casualties and displacement rates.'

1.1. Overview of recent conflicts in Afghanistan

The so-called *Saur* Revolution on 27 April 1978 brought the Afghan communists to power ([31]). In 1979, the government of the former Soviet Union (SU) invaded Afghanistan to support the communist Afghan government headed by Babrak Karmal. The invasion was followed by a decade of armed conflict between the Afghan government, supported by Soviet troops, and armed opposition groups, often referred to as the "mujahideen". These groups were divided into several different factions, but they all participated in a nation-wide armed uprising that lasted until the government finally collapsed in 1992, following the Soviet troops' withdrawal in 1989 ([32]).

After this collapse, a period generally referred to as "the Civil War" saw different mujahideen groups who had formed new alliances and fronts fight for control of Afghanistan. War between the competing mujahideen factions and militias was characterised by severe human rights breaches ([33]). This led to the emergence in 1994 of a group called the Taliban, who brought stability in areas under their control, which won them support from the population ([34]). They gradually gained more control and conquered Kabul in 1996. By 2001, the Taliban controlled most of the Afghan

([28]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 March 2014, p. 13; Ruttig, T., Warlords, Religious Leaders, Insurgents: Three external publications, 7 October 2014; Dorronsoro, G., 'Afghanistan: The impossible transition', June 2011, pp. 10, 12 and 15; Giustozzi, A., Koran, Kalashnikov and laptop. The Neo – Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, 2007, pp. 55-62.

([29]) Gross, R., 'Chief Legal Advisor for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and legal advisor for US forces in Afghanistan in 2009 and 2010', 15 November 2013, p. 85; Geiß, R. and Siegrist, M., 'Has the armed conflict in Afghanistan affected the rules on the conduct of hostilities?', March 2011, pp. 13-16; UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 94; UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016,p. 10.

([30]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2016, p. 1.

([31]) Barfield, T., A Cultural and Political History, 2010, pp. 195-225.

([32]) Barfield, T., A Cultural and Political History, 2010, pp. 227-233, 238-239; BBC, Afghanistan profile – Timeline, updated on: 27 October 2015; Ipsos/ICRC, Our world. Views from the field. Summary report: Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Georgia, Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia and the Philippines. Opinion Survey, June 2009, p. 10; Oxfam International, The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009, November 2009, pp. 7-9.

([33]) Barfield, T., A Cultural and Political History, 2010, p. 253.

([34]) Zaeef, A. S., My Life with the Taliban, 2010, p. 10; ICG, The Insurgency in Afghanistan' Heartland, 17 June 2011, pp. 3-4; Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, January 2012, p. 22.

territory. But by the end of the year, as a consequence of the 11 September attacks in the US, they were ousted by a US-led military operation. The US gave its support to the mujahideen front opposing the Taliban, at that time known as *Northern Alliance* or *Northern coalition* ([35]).

On 22 December 2001, based on the so-called Bonn Agreement, an Afghan interim government was formed, led by Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun, who also won the first presidential elections in October 2004 ([36]). By then, the Taliban had reorganised and engaged in an insurgency against the Karzai government. The latter was supported by an international coalition of armed forces. The AGEs initially infiltrated pockets in South and East Afghanistan. They extended their reach gradually to more areas and started to control territory ([37]). Other AGE groups operated with, or alongside, the Taliban, including: Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan (HIA) led by Hekmatyar, the Haqqani network, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) ([38]). This insurgency was characterised by mainly asymmetric warfare: AGEs used roadside and suicide bombs and complex([39]) attacks, intimidation of civilians and targeted killings to destabilise the country. This was countered by searches, clearance operations and bombings by the ANSF and the IMF ([40]). The security situation rapidly deteriorated from 2006, leading to more direct and open armed confrontations ([41]).

Between 2001 and 2010, AGEs gradually infiltrated and gained ground in the different provinces of Afghanistan ([42]). From 2010 onwards, the Taliban-led insurgency spread into all regions of Afghanistan. By the end of 2014, a transition of security responsibility from international troops to the ANSF was realised. Most foreign troops withdrew ([43]). At the end of 2015, sources estimated the Taliban controlled or contested between 25 % and 30 % of all districts in Afghanistan ([44]).

The disputed 2014 presidential election resulted in a political compromise which led to the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG), under the Presidency of Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. The NUG is deeply divided and often unable to make strategic decisions. Its popularity is further undermined by increasing security problems, although opposition is also highly fragmented ([45]). Parliamentary and provincial elections scheduled for 2015 were postponed due to contested electoral reforms. A Special Electoral Reform Commission was established in July 2015 and Parliamentary and District Council elections are scheduled for 15 October 2016 ([46]).

The NUG continued to initiate security and reconciliation dialogues but with limited success. In January 2015, the Taliban stated that its preconditions for entering peace-talks were: the end of foreign military presence, the establishment of an Islamic government and the implementation of the Sharia ([47]).

The US decided to slow down its troop withdrawal and, in July 2016, President Obama promised to keep 8,400 US troops in order to be able to continue to train the ANSF ([48]).

([35]) Barfield, T., A Cultural and Political History, 2010, pp. 248-254 and 258-262; BBC, Afghanistan profile – Timeline, updated on: 27 October 2015; Ipsos/ICRC, Our world. Views from the field. Summary report: Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Georgia, Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia and the Philippines. Opinion Survey, June 2009, p. 10; Oxfam International, The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009, November 2009, pp. 9-12.

([36]) Oxfam International, The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009, November 2009, p. 13.

([37]) CS Monitor, Taliban appears to be regrouped and well-funded, 8 May 2003; Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, January 2012, p. 44; Roggio, B., Taliban contest or control large areas of Afghanistan, 2 December 2009; International NY Times, Taliban Making Military Gains in Afghanistan, 26 July 2014.

([38]) ICG, The Insurgency in Afghanistan' Heartland, 17 June 2011, pp. 14-15; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 18 June 2014, p. 6.

([39]) See glossary.

([40]) Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, January 2012; UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014.

([41]) Ipsos/ICRC, Our world. Views from the field. Summary report: Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Georgia, Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia and the Philippines. Opinion Survey, June 2009, p. 10; EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Afghanistan, Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, pp. 16-17, 24; Geiß, R. and Siegrist, M., 'Has the armed conflict in Afghanistan affected the rules on the conduct of hostilities?', March 2011, pp. 17-21; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 March 2014; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 18 June 2014.

([42]) Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, January 2012, p. 44.

([43]) NATO, Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead, updated on: 13 October 2014; NATO, Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, updated on: 27 February 2015; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, p. 2; see part on IMF.

([44]) SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 January 2016, p. 4; UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016, p. 10.

([45]) Asia Foundation, A Survey of Afghan People Afghanistan in 2015, 17 November 2015, p. 95, UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016, p. 12; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2016, p. 3.

([46]) HRW, World Report 2016 - Afghanistan, 27 January 2016; AAN, The IEC Announces 2016 Electon Date, 18 January 2016.

([47]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 27 February 2015, pp. 1-3; USIP, Urgent Imperative: Get Afghanistan's Government Working, 10 December 2015; SCR, June 2015 Monthly Forecast, Afghanistan, 1 March 2016, pp. 1-2.

([48]) BBC, Ashraf Ghani visit: US to slow Afghan troops withdrawal, 24 March 2015; Al Jazeera, Obama to slow pace of Afghanistan troop withdrawal, 7 July 2016.

1.2. Actors in the conflict

1.2.1. Pro-Government Forces (PGF) ([49])

The Pro-Government Forces (PGF) consist of: the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF); Pro-Government Militias (PGM); and the International Military Forces (IMF).

Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)

The ANSF consist of: the Afghan National Army (ANA); the Afghan National Police (ANP); and the National Directorate of Security (NDS) ([50]). The ANSF was set up with an anticipated recruitment of 352,000 (soldiers and police) but never reached that goal ([51]). In 2015, ANSF had growing problems with recruitment. Its actual numbers are difficult to estimate taking into account the high rate of ANSF casualties, high rate of desertion and existence of "ghost" soldiers – those enlisted who do not actively take part. The problem is particularly acute in more volatile areas of Afghanistan. Reasons for desertion mentioned by the sources include: high casualty rates, rising number of violent clashes, poor leadership, lack of payment and leave, etc ([52]).

Despite these weaknesses and the lack of foreign support, the ANSF continued to fight against AGEs in 2015 without foreign support. The troops were particularly active in the provinces of Kunduz, Badakhshan, Zabul, Ghazni, and Helmand ([53]). SIGAR assessed that 'ANSF continued to improve integration of indirect-fire and close-air attack capabilities but its performance has been uneven with serious capability gaps in aviation, intelligence, logistics, maintenance, operational planning, coordination and leadership' ([54]).

In 2015, ANSF casualties reached 16,000 ([55]). In the first half of 2016, Tolo News reported 1,700 new casualties suffered by the ANSF ([56]).

Afghan National Army (ANA)

The ANA reports to the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and is part of the armed forces of Afghanistan ([57]). The ANA is seen as one of the strongest institutions in Afghanistan, although there are many challenges, including reinforcing or resupplying units in remote areas ([58]). As of April 2016, the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported a total of 171,428 ANA staff ([59]). AREU reported in March 2016 on the problems of the ANA, including a rising number of casualties, a leadership crisis and lack of equipment ([60]).

Afghan National Police (ANP)

The ANP is the police force under the Ministry of Interior (MoI). As of April 2016, SIGAR reported it had 148,167 staff, including 2,879 women ([61]). It has several specialised divisions: the Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP – more than 110,000 personnel), the Afghan National Border Police (ANBP), the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) and the Counter-Narcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA) ([62]).

([49]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2015, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, August 2015, p. 91.

([50]) UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, p. 3.

([51]) SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 April 2016, p. 8.

([52]) SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 April 2016, p. 8; Reuters, Desertions deplete Afghan forces, adding to security worries, 18 January 2016; AREU, The Afghan National Army After ISAF, March 2016, pp. 1, 14; Daily Outlook Afghanistan, The Capabilities and Weaknesses of ANSF, 12 January 2016.

([53]) USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2015 - Afghanistan, 2 June 2016.

([54]) SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 April 2016, p. 14.

([55]) Kabul Tribune, ANSF capable to respond security challenges, 1 August 2016.

([56]) Tolo News, Terror Attacks Down, Casualties Up in First Six Months of 2016: Report, updated on: 18 July 2016.

([57]) USDOS, 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 13 April 2016.

([58]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 1 September 2015, p. 5.

([59]) SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2016, p. 93.

([60]) AREU, The Afghan National Army After ISAF, March 2016, p. 1.

([61]) SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2016, pp. 93, 112.

([62]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 9 September 2014, p. 7; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 9 September 2014; ISAF, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), 26 October 2010; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 October 2014, pp. 99-100; 106.

Afghan Local Police (ALP)

In August 2010, the Afghan Local Police (ALP) was created as a security initiative led by the Ministry of Interior and funded by the US government. Officially, the ALP reports to the MOI at national level but, in practice, since June 2015, it has been subordinated to the Afghan Uniformed Police. SIGAR states that the ALP members are selected by village elders or local power brokers to protect their communities against Taliban attack, to guard facilities and to conduct local counterinsurgency missions ([63]). According to SIGAR, ALP district leaders and checkpoint leaders coordinate the ALP's daily activities. The guardians, the lowest rank, make up the overwhelming majority of ALP personnel ([64]).

As of May 2016, the ALP had almost 30,000 personnel in 179 districts of 30 provinces (not present in Panjsher, Bamyan, Khost and Nimroz), of whom 25,000 were fully trained ([65]).

Several difficulties concerning the ALP were reported, including problems with supplying ressources, police commanders using staff as personal bodyguards and allegations of serious misconduct and human-rights violations by ALP forces. However, over the years its efficiency has improved and there are less complaints about misconduct ([66]). Nevertheless, in 2016, UNAMA still reports on serious abuses by ALP. The MOI declared that ALP has been largely cleared of influence from local warlords and some 240 ALP members were prosecuted because of human-rights violations ([67]).

Pro-Government Militias (PGM)

A specific local security structure has existed in Afghan society for hundreds of years: the *arbaki*, community or tribal armies ([68]). From the beginning of the insurgency, different paramilitary initiatives have been developed and formalised to support the Afghan government and assist the formal armed forces of Afghanistan. The government IMF have also relied on militias that are not part of any formal government entity, for conducting searches, night raids or executions. This happened for instance during the Andar uprising against the Taliban in 2013. The formalised paramilitary initiatives have all ceased except for the ALP (see section on ALP), now operating within the official security structures ([69]).

In 2015, the government developed a "National Uprising Support Strategy" to cover areas in Afghanistan where it had little military presence. By the end of 2015, UNAMA reported the formation of armed groups within this context in 10 provinces. The NDS reportedly approached village or tribal elders to support uprisings against the AGEs, by urging group members to form armed groups varying from 22 to 500 fighters, commanded by NDS or ANP. The government promised to formalise this temporary initiative in the structures of the ALP within three months ([70]).

UNAMA expressed its concerns about the increased use of armed militias by the government in 2015. In the past such groups were accused of some serious human-rights abuses, i.e. misuse of weapons, political connections with powerful individuals, lack of knowledge on humanitarian law and also impunity. Cases of extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, threats, intimidation and harassment, theft and assaults were documented, especially in the North and North-East of Afghanistan ([71]).

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

([64]) SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 April 2016, p. 107, SIGAR, A Critical Rural Security Initiative Lacks Adequate Logistics Support, Oversight, and Direction, October 2015, pp. 1,2, 9.

([65]) SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2016, p. 100; Outlook Afghanistan, Outlook Afghanistan, ALP Forces Keep Security in 40pc of Afghanistan: Official, 11 July 2016.

([66]) SIGAR, A Critical Rural Security Initiative Lacks Adequate Logistics Support, Oversight, and Direction, October 2015, pp. 1, 2, 9; HRW, Just Don't Call It a Militia, September 2011, pp. 58-75; IWPR, Afghans Want More Funding for Local Police, But More Scrutiny Too, 3 September 2015; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 9 September 2014, p. 8; ICG, The Future of the Afghan Local Police, 4 June 2015, page I; NY Times, Afghan Plan to Expand Militia Raises Abuse Concerns, 16 October 2015; UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2015, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, August 2015, pp. 69-72.

([67]) UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016; Outlook Afghanistan, Outlook Afghanistan, ALP Forces Keep Security in 40pc of Afghanistan: Official, 11 July 2016.

([68]) Seraj, A., Opinion: The Arbaki can secure Afghanistan better than the US, updated on: 5 November 2014; HRW, Just Don't Call It a Militia, September 2011, pp. 13-14.

([69]) HRW, Just Don't Call It a Militia, September 2011; Habib, E., The Morphing of the Andar Uprising: transition to Afghan Local Police, 2 April 2013.

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

([71]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, pp. 65-66; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, pp. 84-88; HRW, Afghanistan: Forces Linked to Vice President Terrorize Villagers, 31 July 2016; UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2015, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, August 2015, p. 73; HRW, Today we shall all die, 3 March 2015; Irinnews, Abuses rise along with pro-Afghan government militias, 7 September 2015; Al Jazeera America, Exclusive: A US-backed militia runs amok in Afghanistan, 23 July 2014; VOA, In Afghan North, US-Backed Militias Spur Local Backlash, 23 November 2011; Hewad, G., Legal, illegal: Militia recruitment and (failed) disarmament in Kunduz, 10 November 2012; Bleuer, C. and Ali, O., Security in Kunduz Worsening Further: The case of Khanabad, 28 October 2014; Irinnews, AFGHANISTAN: Fears over child recruitment, abuse by pro-government militias, 20 January 2011.

International Military Forces (IMF)

UNAMA explains the scope of the term "International Military Forces" as follows ([72]):

> 'International Military Forces' include all foreign troops forming part of NATO-led Operation Resolute Support (formerly International Security Assistance Force, ISAF) and other US Forces Afghanistan (including Operation Freedom's Sentinel, which replaced Operation Enduring Freedom on 1 January 2015) who are under the Commander of Resolute Support (COM-RS), who is also Commander of the US Forces in Afghanistan. The term also encompasses Special Operations Forces and other foreign intelligence and security forces.

Until 31 December 2014, IMF operated under two military missions: Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) ([73]).

Operation Enduring Freedom began on 7 October 2001, with air strikes on Taliban and al Qaeda targets, executed by the US and its allies ([74]). The ISAF was deployed under a peace enforcement mandate pursuant to Chapter VII of the UN Charter and the authority of the UN Security Council. It operated between August 2003 and 31 December 2014 under NATO command ([75]). Its mission was to support the Afghan government, reduce the capability and break the spirit of the insurgency ([76]). As of 6 October 2014, ISAF's total strength was 34,512 troops, from 48 contributing nations ([77]).

Transition and Operation Resolute Support

From 2010, the process of gradual transition of security responsibilities from IMF to ANSF was implemented, to be completed by the end of 2014 ([78]). From 2012, countries started withdrawing troops from combat missions in Afghanistan and ending military operations in Afghanistan ([79]). On 31 December 2014, the ISAF's mandate expired and, on 1 January 2015, this led to the transition from NATO's ISAF combat mission to a new non-combat mission (Resolute Support) with a focus on training, advising and assisting ANSF ([80]).

At the end of 2015 there was a 13,000-strong residual force used for training and counter-terrorism operations, including 9,800 US troops (down from a peak of about 100,000) ([81]). Countries with troops still in Afghanistan include Georgia, Germany, Turkey, Romania, Italy, the UK and Australia. Due to a growing Taliban threat, in July 2016 US President Barack Obama announced that he would maintain 8,400 troops for further training of Afghan Security Forces and to support them in the fight against remaining al Qaeda terrorists ([82]).

1.2.2. Anti-Government Elements (AGEs)

UNAMA defines "Anti-Government Elements" (also referred to as insurgents) as ([83]):

> 'all individuals and armed groups involved in armed conflict with or armed opposition against the Government of Afghanistan and/or international military forces. They include those who identify as 'Taliban' as well as individuals and non-State organised armed groups taking a direct part in hostilities and assuming a variety of labels including the Haqqani Network, Hezb-e-Islami, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkari Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed, groups identifying themselves as 'Daesh' and other militia and armed groups pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives including armed criminal groups directly engaged in hostile acts on behalf of a party to the conflict.'

([72]) UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 103.

([73]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014, p. 78; CNN, Operation Enduring Freedom Fast Facts, updated on: 27 October 2014.

([74]) CNN, Operation Enduring Freedom Fast Facts, updated on: 27 October 2014.

([75]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2014, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2014, p. 78.

([76]) ISAF, About ISAF – Mission, n.d.

([77]) ISAF, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): Key Facts and Figures, 6 October 2014.

([78]) NATO, Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead, updated on: 13 October 2014.

([79]) CNN, France pulls last troops from combat roles in Afghanistan, 20 December 2012; Government of Canada, Canadian Armed Forces completes military mission in Afghanistan, 12 March 2014; CNN, UK formally ends combat mission in Afghanistan, 26 October 2014.

([80]) NATO, Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, updated on: 27 February 2015; UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, p. 2.

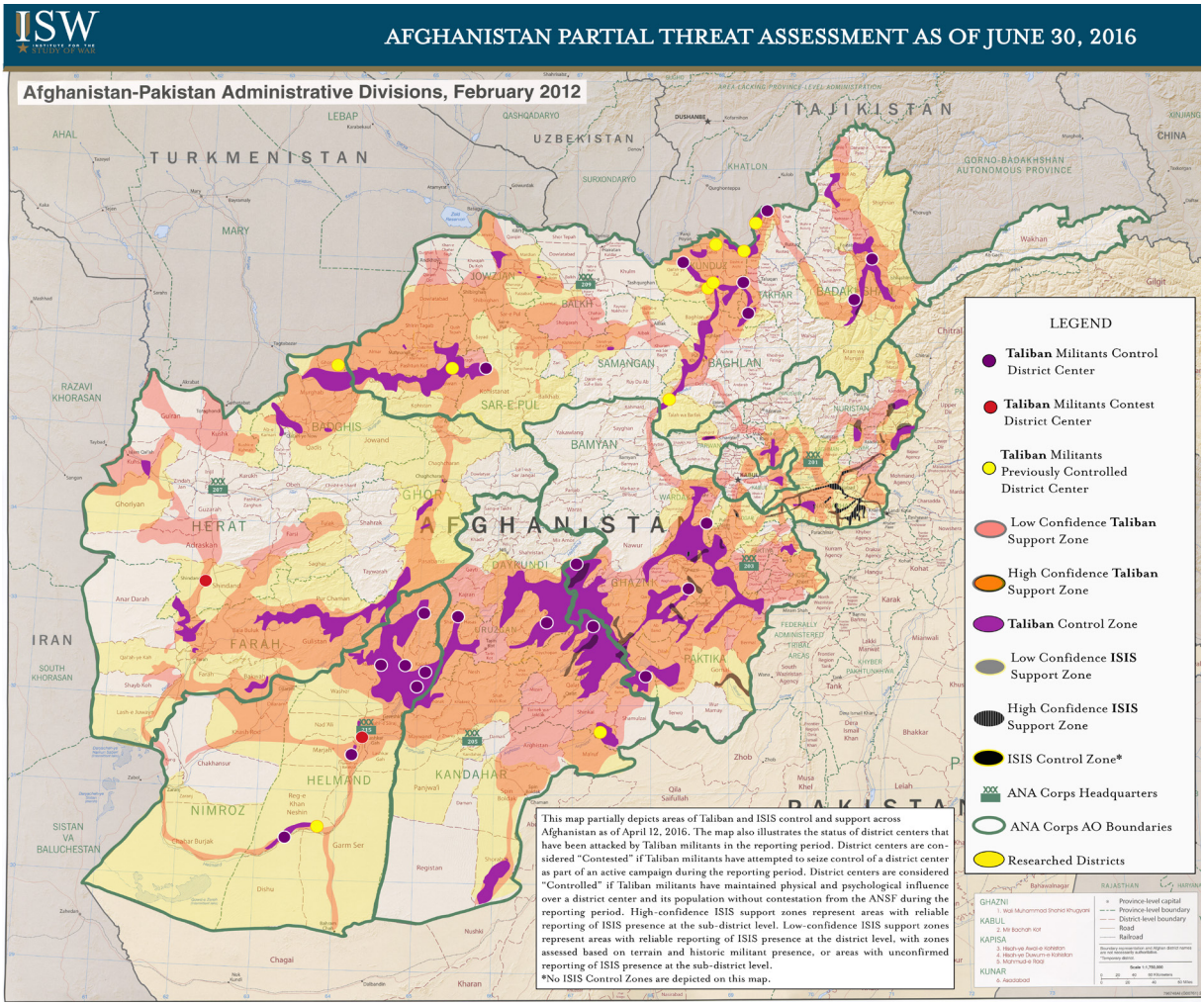
([81]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 18 June 2014; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 9 September 2014; RFE/RL, Explainer: Key Points In U.S.-Afghan Bilateral Security Agreement, 30 September 2014.

([82]) Wall Street Journal, Obama: Troops to Remain in Afghanistan Past 2016 [video], 15 October 2015; BBC; How many foreign troops are in Afghanistan, 15 October 2015; Al Jazeera, Obama to slow pace of Afghanistan troop withdrawal, 7 July 2016;

([83]) UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 99.

In recent years, the range of AGE groups and splinter groups has widened. Besides the main AGE forces (Taliban, Haqqani network, HIA, IMU), several smaller groups have reappeared that are often even more radical than the Taliban. Examples of such splinter groups are: Feday-e Mahaz (suicide brigade); Mullah Dadullah Front; Jihadi Shura of Mujahidin for Unity and Understanding ([84]); Tora Bora Front; Jamat Sunat al-Dawa Salafia and the Latif Mansur Network ([85]).

In map 2, the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) reports on Taliban and Islamic State influence and control zones (June 2016) ([86]).



Map 2: Partial Threat Assessment (30 June 2016); source: Institute for the Study of War

In June 2015, the UN reported that the majority of an estimated 7,180 foreign fighters across the country were associated with Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the IMU ([87]).

According to Tolo News, AGE groups suffered 7,000 casualties in the conflict during the first half of 2016 ([88]).

Most of the groups mentioned in this chapter were set up in prior phases of Afghanistan's recent conflict history, even dating back to the first mujahideen period in the 1970s. However, more details about their respective backgrounds do not fall within the scope of this report.

([84]) RFE/RL, Taliban Splinter Groups Add To Election Fears In Afghanistan, 13 March 2014.

([85]) UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, pp. 3, 6.

([86]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016.

([87]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2015, p. 5.

([88]) Tolo News, Terror Attacks Down, Casualties Up in First Six Months of 2016: Report, updated on: 18 July 2016.

Taliban

The Taliban consists of AGE groups that acknowledged the leadership (Amir-ul-Momineen) of Mullah Mohammad Omar and the Taliban Leadership Council in Quetta, Pakistan. The Taliban leadership ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 and regrouped after it was ousted from power. The different groups have varying operational autonomy but there is a governing system under the Leadership Council with several regional and local layers. They have a military council and a command structure with, at the lowest level, front commanders overseeing a group of fighters. The governing structure and military command is defined in the Taliban's Lahya or Code of Conduct ([89]).

Mullah Mohammad Omar reportedly died on 23 April 2013 but his death was only officially announced in 2015. Omar's deputy, Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour was appointed as the new leader in July 2015 ([90]). Rifts emerged within the Taliban leadership about this succession but Mansour got the support of a significant part of the leadership ([91]). He was killed in a US drone strike on 21 May 2016, which was confirmed by the Taliban within a few days. It announced the election of the new leader, Haibatullah Akhunzada, the Taliban's former chief justice. He is believed to be about 60 years of age and a member of the Noorzai tribe from Kandahar. Serajuddin Haqqani and Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, son of Mullah Omar, were announced as deputies ([92]). In August 2016, it was reported by some media that a Taliban breakaway faction in Zabul known as Mahaaz-e-Dadullah appointed Mullah Emdadullah Mansour as its leader, but this was denied by members of the group who declared support to Haibatullah ([93]).

In 2015, under Mansour's command, the Taliban conducted an offensive which started off with almost simultaneous attacks in 22 provinces in Afghanistan ([94]). Heavy fighting has continued for months across Afghanistan, from Kunduz, the northern city that fell briefly to the AGEs, to Helmand Province bordering Pakistan in the south. In Helmand, government forces have retreated from many areas and are struggling to hold centres close to the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah ([95]).

In April 2016, after a winter break, the Taliban started a new spring offensive called "Operation Omari" ([96]). The operation started with a high-profile attack in Kabul and continued with increasing numbers of attacks on administrative centres in Kunduz, Helmand, Uruzgan and Baghlan provinces. This led to heavy clashes but the ANSF managed to repel these attacks ([97]).

Haqqani network

The Haqqani network is an insurgent network in the south-east of Afghanistan, with its origins in the 1970s mujahideen groups. Its leader, Jalaluddin Haqqani, has attacked Afghan government officials since 1971. It is believed he fled to Pakistan in late 2001. The network has its most important base in North Waziristan. Due to his age, he handed over the de facto leadership of the group to his son, Serajuddin Haqqani. Although the network has maintained an autonomous position, structure and its own modus operandi, it is considered part of the Taliban. Serajuddin Haqqani was appointed as a deputy leader of the Taliban in May 2016. The Haqqani network is known for various high-profile attacks on targets in Kabul City ([98]).

Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan

Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan (HIA) is an insurgent group led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The group demands the withdrawal of foreign troops and has conducted high-profile attacks in the capital but has been more open to negotiation with

([89]) EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Afghanistan, Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, pp. 18-20.

([90]) Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, A detailed interview of Zabihullah Mujahid with the Daily Asharq Al-Awsat about the recent developments, September 2015; RFE/RL, Afghan Government Says Taliban Leader Mullah Omar Dead, updated on: 29 July 2015.

([91]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 1 September 2015, p. 2; RFE/RL, Top Taliban Official Quits Amid Succession Questions, 4 August 2014.

([92]) Reuters, Afghan Taliban appoint new leader after Mansour's death, 25 May 2016; NPR, Taliban Name New Leader, Confirm Death Of Mullah Mansour, 25 May 2016; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Statement by the Leadership Council of Islamic Emirate regarding the martyrdom of Amir ul Mumineen Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour and the election of the new leader, 25 May 2016

([93]) 1 TV News, Taliban breakaway faction appoints new leader in Afghanistan, 16 August 2016; Express Tribune (The), Breakaway Taliban faction mired in uncertainty, 26 August 2016.

([94]) UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, p. 5.

([95]) Reuters, Taliban announce start of spring offensive in Afghanistan, 12 April 2016; See provincial chapter on Helmand.

([96]) Reuters, Taliban announce start of spring offensive in Afghanistan, 12 April 2016; Foschini, F., Under the Mountain: A pre-emptive Taleban spring offensive in Shindand, 20 April 2016

([97]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2016 p. 5

([98]) Jamestown Foundation, 'The Haqqani Network and Cross-Border Terrorism in Afghanistan', 24 March 2008; Ruttig, T., *Talking Haqqani*, 1 July 2010; Washington Times, *Haqqani Network, Pakistan terror group, grows into worst enemy for U.S.*, 5 June 2014; Reuters, Afghan Taliban appoint new leader after Mansour's death, 25 May 2016

the Afghan government than the Taliban. The latter criticizes HIA for this and on occasions there has been fighting between both insurgent groups in different areas ([99]). AAN reports: 'HIA controls fighters in many provinces across the country, with strongholds in Wardak, Baghlan, Kapisa, Farah and Kunar, but it has not consolidated any significant territorial control or parallel administration structures, like the Taleban. Its military impact is also significantly smaller' ([100]). The group came close to signing a peace deal with the Afghan Government but finally Hekmatyar withdrew from it. In August 2016 it was reported that negotiations had been reopened ([101]).

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is an insurgent network consisting of many fighters who fled government suppression in Uzbekistan. It has links with the Taliban and with insurgent groups in Pakistan. It is active in parts of Faryab, Takhar, Balkh and Kunduz and also operates in East Afghanistan where it is affiliated with al Qaeda. It conducts attacks on ANSF ([102]).

On 31 March 2015, the IMU reportedly pledged allegiance to Islamic State (IS) ([103]). IMU's fighters are also called "Jundullah" and they reportedly operated in larger groups fighting in Afghanistan's northern provinces in recent years. Their ranks consist of Uzbeks, other ex-Soviet Muslim nationalities, Uyghurs and Arabs. RFE/RL reported fractures in the ranks of IMU. Alliances and motives of different dispersed IMU groups became hard to assess and some of its fighters are even active in Syria and Iraq. The fate of IMU's leader, Usman Ghazi, is unknown. According to RFE/RL, there are reports that he was executed and other sources report he fled and is hiding ([104]).

Al Qaeda and affiliated groups

Al Qaeda is present in the east of Afghanistan and its affiliated groups carry out attacks on ANSF. TTP, Lashkar-e Taiba (LeT), and Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LeJ) are affiliated groups([105]) mainly operating from Pakistan ([106]). Al Qaeda-related groups were reportedly not organised under a coordinated leadership but they contribute to security problems in border regions with Pakistan ([107]).

Al Qaeda was reported to have training camps in several locations in the south and the east of Afghanistan ([108]). Acting Defense Minister Masoom Stanikzai stated that al Qaeda was keeping a low profile but expanding. It is working in the shadow, supporting other terrorist networks. US officials said the number of al Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan could be as high as 300, including other facilitators and sympathisers in its network ([109]).

Islamic State (IS)

The first reports about IS (also called ISIS, ISIL or *Daesh*) appearing in Afghanistan date back to the summer of 2014 ([110]). IS envisages global expansion of the caliphate and designates the region of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and central-Asian republics, *wolayat Khurasan* (ISK – Islamic State in Khurasan) ([111]). The recruited groups or fighters often include discontented Taliban or other AGEs and IS recruits mainly ideologically motivated individuals ([112]). Militant groups such as Tehrik-e-Khilafat Pakistan, the Shahidullah Shahid Group of TTP and Jundullah/IMU pledged allegiance

([99]) EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Afghanistan, Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 24; Münch, P. and Ruttig, T., 'Between Negotiations and Ongoing Resistance. The Situation of the Afghan Insurgency', 2014.

([100]) AAN, Almost Signed? The peace agreement with Hezb-e Islami, 21 may 2016.

([101]) Roggio, B., Hekmatyar withdraws from peace talks with Afghan government, 28 June 2016; Pashtun Times (The), The Gulbadin Hekmatyar-led Hezb-i-Islami optimistic about concluding peace deal with Kabul, 8 August 2016; Afghanistan Times, Government to reach a peace agreement with HIA, 8 August 2016.

([102]) EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Afghanistan, Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 24; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 18 June 2014.

([103]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2015, p. 5.

([104]) RFE/RL, The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan Comes Unraveled, 25 May 2016.

([105]) See Glossary.

([106]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 18 June 2014; EASO, Country of Origin Information Report, Afghanistan, Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012, p. 24.

([107]) UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, pp. 10-11.

([108]) LWJ, US military strikes large al Qaeda training camps in southern Afghanistan, 13 October 2015.

([109]) CNN, Al Qaeda 'very active' in Afghanistan: U.S Commander, 13 April 2016.

([110]) LWJ, Mapping the emergence of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, 5 March 2015.

([111]) Jamestown Foundation (The), 'Islamic State in Afghanistan Ready to Capitalize on Mullah Omar's Death', 3 September 2015.

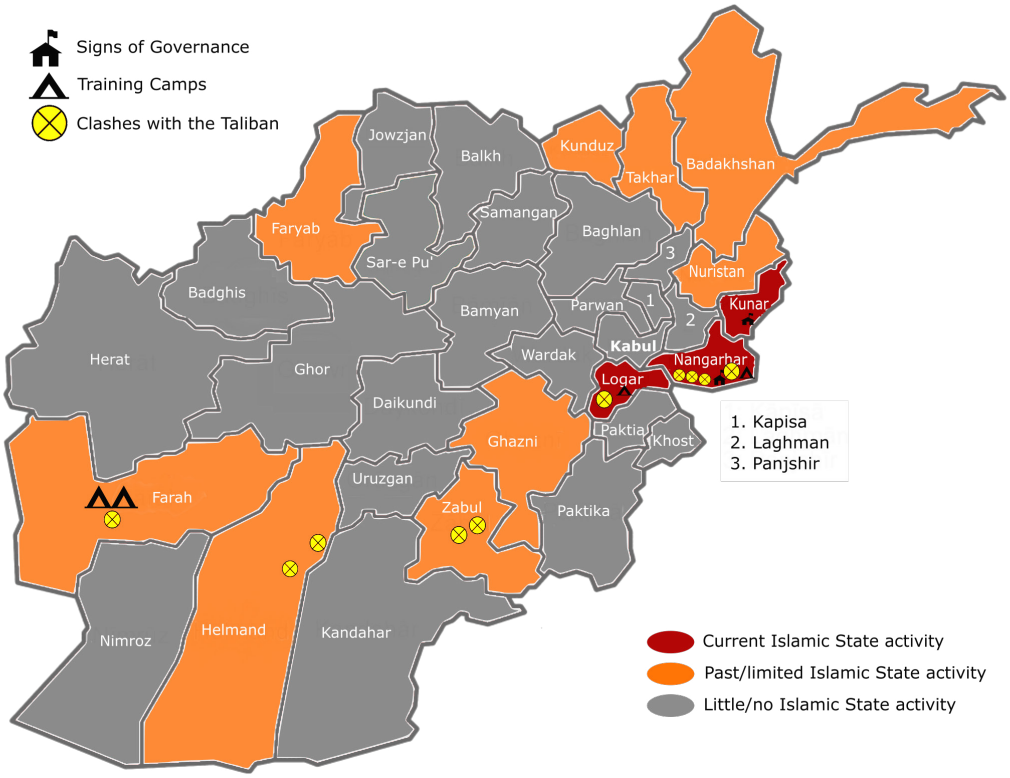
([112]) Jamestown Foundation (The), 'Islamic State in Afghanistan Ready to Capitalize on Mullah Omar's Death', 3 September 2015; Western security official, anonymous source specialised in security in Afghanistan, emails and briefing, July 2015 – July 2016.

to the leader of IS, al-Baghdadi ([113]). Some of them have links with IS in Syria and Iraq but reportedly some Afghan groups have started using the name of IS without having a connection with the organisation ([114]). The leader of ISK, Hafiz Saeed Khan, was killed on 26 July 2016 by a US drone in Nangarghar Province ([115]).

Depending on the source, in early 2016 ISIS had an estimated 1,000 to 8,500 fighters in Afghanistan. The centre of their activities is in Nangarhar, especially the districts of Achin, Nazyan and Beh Bala. They are engaged in battles with both the Taliban and government forces ([116]).

ISK-affiliated fighters closed schools, stopped polio vaccinations, abducted and forced widows and young girls to marry their fighters, burned homes of Taliban supporters, executed elders and Taliban leaders. They strongly oppose the presence of foreigners and their operations create inaccessibility of areas, mainly in several districts in Nangarhar. They loot, burn or take over houses which forces people to flee ([117]).

The Middle East Institute reports that the ISK group lacked local roots from the beginning of its appearance in Afghanistan. Its brutality and extreme ideology alienated the local population. Consistent losses on the battlefield also contributed to a significant weakening of IS in Afghanistan ([118]).



Map 3: Islamic State Activity: 2014-2016; source: Middle East Institute

([113]) Jamestown Foundation (The), 'Islamic State in Afghanistan Ready to Capitalize on Mullah Omar's Death', 3 September 2015; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2015, p. 5.

([114]) Latifi, Ali M., Skype interview, 7 September 2015; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, A detailed interview of Zabihullah Mujahid with the Daily Asharq Al-Awsat about the recent developments, September 2015; UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, pp. 9-10; Western security official, anonymous source specialised in security in Afghanistan, emails and briefing, July 2015 – July 2016; Clark, K. and Osman, B., First wave of IS attacks? Claim and denial over the Jalalabad bombs, 22 April 2015; Osman, B., The Shadows of 'Islamic State' in Afghanistan: What threat does it hold?, 12 February 2015; UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, pp. 9-10.

([115]) Al Jazeera, Afghan-Pakistan ISIL's Hafiz Saeed Khan killed, 13 July 2016.

([116]) USIP, The Islamic State in Afghanistan assessing the Threat, April 2016; Eurasia Review; Rising Influence Of Islamic State In Afghanistan: Dangerous Phenomena For Region And World – Analysis, 8 April 2016; Jamestown Foundation (The), 'Islamic State in Afghanistan Ready to Capitalize on Mullah Omar's Death', 3 September 2015; Western security official, anonymous source specialised in security in Afghanistan, emails and briefing, July 2015 – July 2016.

([117]) NY Times, Afghan ISIS Branch Makes Inroads in Battle Against Taliban, 13 October 2015; Washington Post (The), The Islamic State is making these Afghans long for the Taliban, 13 October 2015; Western security official, anonymous source specialised in security in Afghanistan, emails and briefing, July 2015 – July 2016.

([118]) Middle East Institute, Examining the Islamic State's Threat to Afghanistan, 25 May 2016.

1.3. Recent security trends and armed confrontations

The overall security situation deteriorated during 2015 since ANSF had to act independently without international support ([119]). The Taliban continued to conduct high-profile attacks in Kabul. Direct armed clashes and attacks intensified in the provinces of Baghlan, Faryab, Helmand, Kunar, Kunduz, Nangahar and Uruzgan. The Taliban also sometimes successfully captured urban areas ([120]). Some sources reported that the conflict was witnessing a fragmentation into more different militant groups, which had a negative impact on civilians, causing more crime growth and less controlled violence ([121]).

In 2016, the security situation remained volatile. In June 2016, the UN reported a slight decrease in the overall number of security incidents compared to 2015 but the number of armed clashes, civilian victims and high-profile attacks in Kabul increased ([122]). Tolo News reported a 12 % decrease in security incidents and terror attacks during the first half of 2016 ([123]).

1.3.1. Armed clashes and assaults

Since the start of the withdrawal of foreign troops (2012), closure of IMF bases and transition of security responsibilities into the hands of the ANSF (2013), the dynamics in the conflict have changed. AGEs have increasingly attacked and challenged ANSF, operating in larger units (up to several hundreds of fighters, using small arms fire, rockets, mortars and grenades). They increasingly took control over larger territories outside the urban centres and became more successful in capturing district administrative centres. Mostly the ANSF has been able to regain control quickly but certain district centres fell under the sustained control of Taliban forces ([124]).

These developments triggered a number of ANSF counter-offensives and clearance operations in several provinces ([125]). Tolo News reported 2,275 military operations during the first six months of 2016 ([126]).

In 2015 and 2016, fighting intensified. Direct armed clashes were the main cause of civilian deaths in this period ([127]). According to the UN Secretary General, more than half of the recorded security incidents in 2015 and 2016 were armed clashes ([128]).

Apart from Taliban-ANSF clashes, several other insurgent groups fought against ANSF or each other during 2015 and 2016. There were reports of clashes between different Taliban factions, between different pro-government militia and between Jamiat-i-Islami and Junbish Party militiamen. IS groups have attacked governmental positions in Nangharhar but also clashed with Taliban groups ([129])**.**

([119]) USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2015 - Afghanistan, 2 June 2016; UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 1; UN Security Council, The situation in Afganistan and its implication for international peace and security, 7 March 2016, p. 4.

([120]) USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2015 - Afghanistan, 2 June 2016; UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015 Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 6.

([121]) International NGO Safety Organization, Afghanistan – Context analysis; NY Times, Violence Flares in Afghanistan Among Various Groups, 21 May 2016; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2016 p. 4; Institute for the Study of War, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment: April 12, 2016

([122]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2016 pp. 4, 7.

([123]) Tolo News, Terror Attacks Down, Casualties Up in First Six Months of 2016: Report, updated on: 18 July 2016.

([124]) Münch, P. and Ruttig, T., 'Between Negotiations and Ongoing Resistance. The Situation of the Afghan Insurgency', 2014, p. 28; LWJ, Taliban controls or contests scores of districts in Afghanistan, 5 October 2015; RFE/RL, Taliban Captures District Center In Afghan Opium Heartland, 26 August 2015; Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015; ISW, Militant Attack and Support Zones in Afghanistan: April - September 2015, 18 September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, MPs fear Kunduz-style attacks in other provinces, 5 October 2015; ICG, Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition, 12 May 2014, pp. I, 11-13, 19-21, 27-28, 36-37; UN Security Council, The situation in Afganistan and its implication for international peace and security, 7 March 2016, pp. 4-5; UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 7.

([125]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 1 September 2015, p. 5; RFE/RL, Kabul Says 88 Militants Killed Across Afghanistan, 9 October 2015; UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, p. 5; Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015; Guardian (The), Afghanistan's warlord vice-president spoiling for a fight with the Taliban, 4 August 2015; Tolo News, 57 Taliban insurgents killed in nationwide ANSF operations, 2 May 2015; Tolo News, 34 Taliban insurgents killed in ANSF operations, 11 May 2015; Tolo News, 19 insurgents killed in afghan forces operations, 3 February 2015.

([126]) Tolo News, Terror Attacks Down, Casualties Up in First Six Months of 2016: Report, updated on: 18 July 2016.

([127]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 29; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict,July 2016, pp. 34-36.

([128]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 1 September 2015, p. 5; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2016, p. 4.

([129]) Western security official, anonymous source specialised in security in Afghanistan, emails and briefing, July 2015 – July 2016; Jamestown Foundation (The), 'Islamic State in Afghanistan Ready to Capitalize on Mullah Omar's Death', 3 September 2015; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 1 September 2015, pp. 1, 5-6; NY Times, Violence Flares in Afghanistan Among Various Groups, 21 May 2016.

1.3.2. Improvised Explosive Devices

An IED can be initiated by the victim or by the attacker. Victim-initiated IEDs are very often pressure plate IEDs (PP-IED) which are prohibited in Afghanistan, being party to the Ottawa Convention or the so-called Mine-Ban Treaty. The use of this weapon is most often a violation of international humanitarian law, as it cannot make a distinction between civilian and military targets. Attacker-initiated IEDs can either be with a timer or remote-controlled (mobile phone, radio, wire). One specific kind of IED is the magnetic IED, which is placed against vehicles ([130]). Suicide IEDs are not time- or distance-controlled and can be body-borne or vehicle-borne (BBIED or SVBIED) ([131]). IEDs and landmines are a danger on roads and adjacent lands throughout Afghanistan ([132]).

The number of civilian casualties caused by IEDs decreased in 2015 and 2016. This tactic caused 17 % of all civilian casualties this year (from January to June 2016, 284 persons were killed by IED and 698 were injured). IEDs are used only by AGEs. In 2015 and 2016, the provinces where the most people were affected by IEDS were: Kandahar, Helmand, Nangarhar, Ghazni, Badakhshan and Faryab ([133]).

1.3.3. High-profile attacks

High-profile attacks, including suicide bombings, complex([134]) and IED attacks, take place regularly in Afghanistan, particularly in Kabul, and the southern and eastern provinces, but AGEs were also able to conduct attacks in cities generally considered relatively safe, such as Mazar-e Sharif ([135]).

AGEs continued to conduct high-profile attacks in the urban centres in order to get media attention, to intimidate and create fear. Such attacks are mainly aimed at government or international forces but the highest numbers of casualties inflicted concern civilians ([136]). Complex and suicide attacks continued to affect civilians in 2015, causing 1,840 civilian casualties (308 deaths and 1,532 injured) and 999 civilian casualties in the first half of 2016 (225 death and 774 injured). The Taliban claimed responsibility for 41 of the 74 documented complex and suicide attacks in 2015, and for 14 of the 26 attacks in 2016 ([137]).

1.3.4. Targeted killings and conflict-related abduction

Targeted killings and abductions are also a serious threat ([138]). According to the UN, the number of targeted killings decreased in the beginning of 2016 compared to the same period in 2015 and the Taliban reportedly focused more on killing military commanders ([139]). In line with this, during the first six months of 2016, UNAMA noticed a significant drop in civilian victims of targeted killings (279 killed and 304 injured), compared to the same period in 2015. Most of the killings were reportedly carried out by AGEs. The Taliban did not claim responsibility for most of them ([140]).

UNAMA documented 410 conflict-related abductions in 2015 (145 persons were killed and 27 injured) and 195 such incidents during the first six months of 2016 (concerning 1,141 persons of whom 46 were killed and 39 injured), almost all carried out by AGEs. Of particular concern were two incidents of mass abduction of vehicle passengers on highways. UNAMA reported that civilians were often abducted by AGEs on suspicion of connections to or collaboration

([130]) UNAMA,Afghanistan Midyear Report 2015, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, August 2015, pp. 45-49, 89.

([131]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2015, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, August 2015, p. 89.

([132]) Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Smartraveller – Afghanistan, 23 May 2016.

([133]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, pp. 34-36; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, pp. 46-48.

([134]) UNAMA definition: A deliberate and coordinated attack that includes a suicide device (i.e. BBIED, VBIED), more than one attacker and more than one type of device (i.e. BBIED + mortars). All three elements must be used for an attack to be considered complex. See glossary.

([135]) UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict,July 2016, p. 53-56; Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Smartraveller – Afghanistan, 23 May 2015; UK Foreign Commonwealth Office, Foreign Travel Advice-Afghanistan, 29 April 2016.

([136]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2016 p. 4; RFE/RL, Taliban Claims Responsibility For Kabul Bombing, 10 August 2015; UNAMA, PRESS STATEMENT: UNAMA calls on Anti-Government Elements to cease attacks in civilian areas, 8 August 2015; Clark K., The triple attack in Kabul: A message? If so, to whom?, 10 August 2015; Reuters, Islamic State claims responsibility for Kabul attack, 80 dead, 24 July 2016; CBSNews, Taliban attack Kabul guesthouse for foreigners, 31 July 2016; US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afganistan, December 2015.

([137]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 41; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict,July 2016, p. 53.

([138]) UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict,July 2016, p. 48; Global Post, Afghanistan's model city is also its kidnapping capital, 27 July 2015.

([139]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2016, pp. 4-5.

([140]) UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, pp. 57-58.

with the government, in addition to targeted abduction of government (security) staff. Other reasons for abduction include: financial gain, by way of demanding ransom in exchange for release; pressure on the government to release captured Taliban fighters ([141]).

1.3.5. Aerial attacks and bombings

In previous years, the number of civilian victims of aerial attacks steadily declined. In 2015, the trend changed and the number of civilian casualties caused by airstrikes rose again. In 2015, there were 296 civilian casualties of aerial attacks (149 deaths and 147 injured) and, in the first half of 2016, 161 casualties (57 killed and 104 injured). According to UNAMA, the growing activity of Afghan Air Force has contributed to this new trend. One of the bloodiest events was the US aerial attack on the Médecins Sans Frontières Hospital in Kunduz, on 3 October 2015, in which civilians and doctors were killed ([142]).

Tolo News reported in total 187 airstrikes against AGEs during the first six months of 2016 ([143]).

1.4. State ability to secure law and order

UNHCR stated in its eligibility guidelines (April 2016) the following on the Afghan state's ability to protect civilians ([144]):

> 'Even where the legal framework provides for the protection of human rights, the implementation of Afghanistan's commitments under national and international law to promote and protect these rights in practice frequently remains a challenge. Afghan governance and the adherence to the rule of law are perceived as particularly weak, while public satisfaction with government performance and confidence in public institutions reportedly decreased sharply in 2015.
>
> The capability of the Government to protect human rights is undermined in many districts by insecurity and the high number of attacks by AGEs. Rural and unstable areas reportedly suffer from a generally weak formal justice system that is unable to effectively and reliably adjudicate civil and criminal disputes. Government-appointed judges and prosecutors are reportedly frequently unable to remain in such communities, due to insecurity. High levels of corruption, challenges to effective governance and a climate of impunity are all reported by observers as factors that weaken the rule of law and undermine the ability of the State to provide protection from human rights violations'

According to the World Justice Project's 2015 Rule of Law Index, Afghanistan ranked 101 on a list of 102 countries in the world on overall rule-of-law scores. This index was composed based on a set of questionnaires sent to experts (on average more than 300 per country) and to the general public ([145]).

1.4.1. Security Forces

USDOS reported for 2015 that: 'civilian authorities generally maintained control over the security forces, although there were instances in which security forces acted independently ([146]).' The police force is mainly occupied with the defence of urban and administrative centres against AGEs' activities. Several problems with the security forces have been reported, including: corruption, extra-judicial killings, use of violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and abuse of detainees. These human-rights violations are often combined with impunity for the security forces, which severely hampers the state's ability to maintain law and order. Some efforts have been made to train security forces, but ANSF personnel still appeared to be largely unaware of their responsibilities and defendants' rights ([147]).

([141]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 41; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, pp. 64-66.

([142]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, pp. 41, 59; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, pp. 75-76; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2016, p. 5.

([143]) Tolo News, Terror Attacks Down, Casualties Up in First Six Months of 2016: Report, updated on: 18 July 2016.

([144]) UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016, pp. 24-25.

([145]) World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2015, p. 6.

([146]) USDOS, 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 13 April 2016.

([147]) USDOS, 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 13 April 2016; UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2015, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, August 2015, pp. 69-72; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2016 - Afghanistan, 7 June 2016; UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016, p. 25; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2016 - Afghanistan, 7 June 2016;

According to various surveys, most Afghans believe the state's security forces (ANA, ALP or ANP) are providing security in their local area. Most Afghans say that the police usually act according to the law although about half of them still doubt their honesty and accountability. ANA is perceived a little bit better than ANP. 42 % of Afghans surveyed had paid a bribe to a police officer. Only in Zabul Province did the majority of the residents believe that AGEs were the main security provider ([148]).

1.4.2. Justice

Seven authorities are involved in the criminal justice sector: the Ministry of Justice, the Attorney General's Office, the Supreme Court, the MoI, the NDS, the MoD and the High Office of Oversight ([149]).

The formal court system, as established in the Constitution, consists of a Supreme Court, High Court of Appeal, Provincial Courts, lower Primary Courts and some specialised courts such as the Juvenile and Family Courts and Counter-Narcotics Courts ([150]). Courts use a mixture of law systems (codified; sharia; local custom) without uniformity and even in Supreme Court judges appeared to have limited knowledge of civilian jurisprudence ([151]).

USDOS reported for 2015 that 'the judiciary continued to be underfunded, understaffed, inadequately trained, ineffective, and subject to threats, bias, political influence, and pervasive corruption.' Impartiality of the judiciary is undermined by bribery and pressure from different parties ([152]). Citizens rated the judiciary as the most corrupt institution in the country. Apart from corruption, a lack of independency is another main constraint in the functioning of civil and criminal courts ([153]).

The judiciary is relatively strong in the larger urban centres, where the government is in control but very weak or non-existent in rural areas, where local elders and shuras ([154]) settle both criminal and civil cases. In some areas the Taliban has enforced a parallel judicial system based on strict interpretation of sharia and on that basis conducts summary executions, lashings and amputations which are criminal acts under Afghan Law. Women in particular suffer from harsh rulings and punishments in honour-related cases. Both official and unofficial systems provide no guarantees for Rule of Law and basic rights of defence ([155]).

The Taliban targets official courts and threatens or kills judges, court officials and prosecutors. In the first half of 2016, UNAMA documented 23 such incidents, resulting in 104 civilian casualties (36 deaths and 68 injured) ([156]).

1.4.3. Detention

The US Department of State reported 'harsh and sometimes life-threatening conditions and abuse in official detention centers' and private prisons run by ANSF members used for torture of arrestees. Inadequate food and water, and poor sanitation facilities were common. A lack of facilities leading to overcrowding was a serious problem. However, according to USDOS: 'inmate deaths were infrequent and largely due to natural causes' ([157]).

Arbitrary arrest and detention were a widespread problem. Prosecutors and police reportedly 'detained individuals without charge for actions that were not crimes under the law' (moral crimes, breach of contract, family disputes) ([158]).

([148]) Asia Foundation, A Survey of Afghan People Afghanistan in 2015, November 2015, p. 40-46; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 April 2016; World Justice Procect, Rule of Law Index 2015, p. 49.

([149]) USDS, 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 13 April 2016; Nederland, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Algemeen Ambtsbericht Afghanistan, September 2014, p. 49-52.

([150]) Tahmindjis, P., The Rule of Law, Democracy and the Legal Profession in the Afghan Context: Challenges and Opportunities, January 2014.

([151]) USDOS, 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 13 April 2016.

([152]) USDOS, 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 13 April 2016.

([153]) Transparency Int., Corruption in Afghanistan: What needs to change, 16 February 2016; World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2015, pp. 46-47.

([154]) A shura is a community council.

([155]) Tahmindjis, P., The Rule of Law, Democracy and the Legal Profession in the Afghan Context: Challenges and Opportunities, January 2014; UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2015, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, August 2015, pp. 54-55, 58-59, 73, 82-83, 94; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2016 - Afghanistan, 7 June 2016; Asia Foundation, A Survey of Afghan People Afghanistan in 2015, November 2015, p. 39.

([156]) UN News Service, Afghanistan: UN condemns attack targeting Logar judicial officials, 5 June 2016; The Hindu, 5 killed in afghan Taliban attack on judicial staff, 5 June 2016; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict,July 2016, pp. 60-62.

([157]) USDOS, 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 13 April 2016.

([158]) USDOS, 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Afghanistan, 13 April 2016.

Human Rights Watch reported on torture in Afghan detention centres and raised concerns about indefinite detention and detention without trial because of national security reasons. Furthermore, children are being detained and tortured on the allegation of being Taliban fighters ([159]).

1.5. Impact of the violence on the civilian population

As UNAMA underlines in its report ([160]):

> 'The current, grinding conflict tragically continued to kill and maim thousands of civilians, destroy livelihoods and property, displace tens of thousands, and restrict freedom of movement of civilians and access to education, health and other services'

In 2015, UNAMA documented the highest number of total civilian casualties since it started recording in 2009: 11,002. This was a 4 % increase compared to 2014. 3,545 of those were civilian deaths, a 4 % decrease compared to 2014 and 7,457 were injured, a 9 % increase ([161]).

From January to June 2016, UNAMA recorded 5,166 civilian casualties, which was again an overall increase of 4 % compared to the same period in 2015. 1,601 of those were civilians killed (a 1 % decrease) and 3,565 injured (6 % increase). Ground engagements continued to the main cause of civilian victims, followed by suicide, complex and IED attacks. Most civilian casualties were attributed by UNAMA to AGEs (60 %). From January 2009 to June 2016, UNAMA documented 63,934 civilian casualties (22,941 deaths and 40,993 injured) in the Afghan conflict ([162]).

Landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) continued to pose a threat for civilians. Most victims are children and goat herders. It is estimated that up to one million people may be disabled and 50,000 to 100,000 are limb amputees. Several de-mining organisations are trying to demine some parts of the country Afghanistan but it takes a lot of time ([163]). UNAMA estimated that, from January to June 2016, 95 were killed and 217 injured because of ERW ([164]).

1.5.1. Socio-economic life

After decades of conflicts, Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries of the world. Most of the population suffer from shortages of housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, and jobs. After a period of steady increase of investment and economic opportunities due to the international presence, in 2014, the withdrawal of foreign troops caused the economy to collapse and capital to flee the country, while the lack of security, corruption and high rate of criminality were impediments to new investments ([165]).

In the beginning of 2016, a lack of security in the country contributed to a drop in foreign investment. Foreign aid also decreased, poverty continued to increase and the educated young generation started migrating abroad ([166]). These developments led to a continuing dire economic situation, significant decrease in jobs and increase in unemployment. In addition, increasing drought, land erosion, bad management, food insecurity, and chronic energy problems make daily life more difficult for Afghans ([167]).

([159]) HRW, Detention of Children as National Security Threats [interactive map], 28 July 2016; HRW, Afghanistan: Reject Indefinite Detention Without Trial, 15 November 2015.

([160]) UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 2.

([161]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 1.

([162]) UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, pp. 1-2.

([163]) Daily Mail, The harrowing plight of children maimed in Afghanistan by the thousands of mines, 21 August 2015; Tolo News, Landmines, Explosives Cover 500 000 sq kms in Afghanistan: UN, 7 February 2016; The Diplomat, Digging for Mines in Afghanistan, 22 March 2016; UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, pp. 21-22.

([164]) UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict,July 2016, p. 26.

([165]) CIA, Factbook, Afghanistan, Economy, n.d.; Majidi, N., 'Helping Them Help Themselves Transitioning out of displacement in Afghanistan, from networks to development aid', Autumn 2015; The Road Ahead: From an "End Date" to an "End State", 16 March 2016; Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People Afghanistan in 2015, November 2015, p. 55; Tolo News, Afghan Economy Trembles Amid Foreign Investment Decline: ACCI, 12 February 2016; Rahimi F.A.F., 'The impact of international forces withdrawal on investment in Herat, Afghanistan', 2016, pp. 44-55.

([166]) Tolo News, Afghan Economy Trembles Amid Foreign Investment Decline: ACCI, 12 February 2016; USIP, What Can be done to Revive Afghanistan's Economy?, February 2016; IRIN, Afghanistan's surprisingly predictable economic crash, 14 March 2016; Washington Post (The), As the U.S. pulls back, more Afghans descend into joblessness, 17 August 2015.

([167]) Washington Post (The), As the U.S. pulls back, more Afghans descend into joblessness, 17 August 2015; Brookings, Afghanistan in 2016: Still vital interests, still reasons for hope, 8 January 2016.

1.5.2. Refugees, IDPs and returnees

As a consequence of demographic pressure (population growth is one of the biggest in the world with 5.4 children per woman) ([168]) and long-lasting war and insecurity, Afghans became one of the most mobile nations of the world. In a protracted refugee crisis caused by more than 35 years of conflict, at least 10 million Afghans fled the country ([169]).

75 % of the population live in the countryside([170]) which is marred by armed conflicts, land disputes and natural disasters. The direct consequences are declining living conditions, impoverishment and food insecurity in rural areas as well as growing militancy and banditry (see Rural/urban division). This situation caused many people being displaced by the conflict and ending up in urban settlements ([171]). From an estimated 500,000 inhabitants in early 2001 Kabul's population has grown to nearly 5 million in 2016. Service delivery has not kept pace with rapid urbanisation and this also causes problems on the labour and housing markets. It also led to rising crime. All of these factors contributed to pushing people into emigration ([172]).

Therefore, the net emigration rate is high (1.5 migrant per 1,000 population). Still many people look for asylum in neighbouring countries. Pakistan and Iran continue to host the vast majority of the Afghan refugee population, totalling an estimated 2.5 million people. Among all those who applied for asylum in 44 countries in Europe, North America, Oceania and Asia in 2014, asylum seekers from Afghanistan were the third-largest group with an estimated 59,500 claims ([173]). In 2015, more than 190,000 Afghans applied for asylum in EU+ states, nearly five times as many as 2014 ([174]).

However, many Afghans decided to return to Afghanistan after 2001 or were deported. From March 2002 to June 2016 UNHCR reported nearly 6 million people returning home of which 4.8 million were assisted by UNHCR and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation. UNHCR estimated that returnees constitute about 20 % of the population ([175]).

Internal displacements

Internal displacements affect all areas of the country, although not to the same extent. More than one million people have left their homes due to the conflict in the country since 2002. The number is growing fast. In 2015 UNHCR, reported some 384,000 newly displaced people compared to about 192,000 persons in 2014. The displacement trends in the first months of 2016 were similar: according to UN estimates about 1,000 Afghans flee their homes every day and about 180 000 left their homes during the first seven months of 2016. Some IDPs are not registered if they settle in urban areas and some of them also can get stuck in areas inaccessible to humanitarian aid ([176]).

([168]) CIA, Factbook, Afghanistan, People and Society.

([169]) Irinnews, In-depth: From pillar to post - the plight of Afghans abroad, 27 February 2012.

([170]) CIA, Factbook, Afghanistan, People and Society.

([171]) UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016, pp. 28-29.

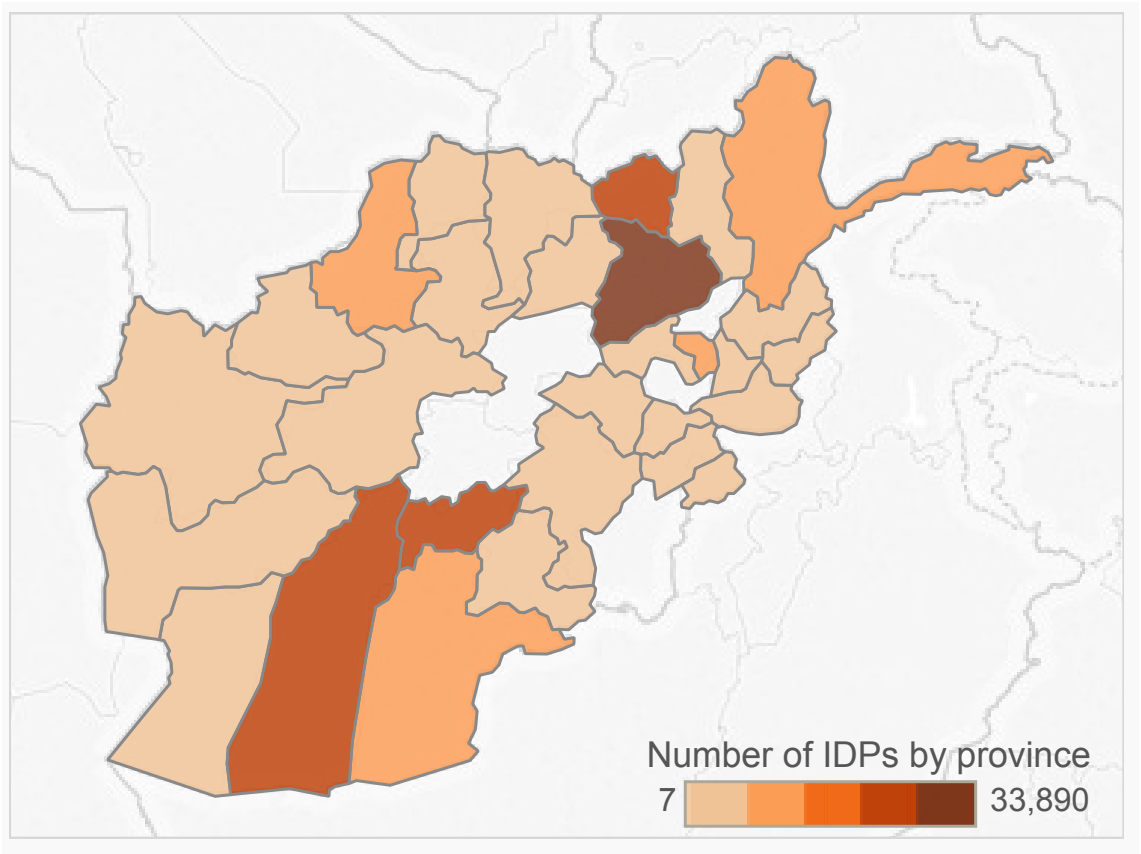
([172]) CIA, Factbook, Afghanistan, People and Society; IRIN, Kabul facing "unregulated" urbanization, 26 November 2007; CIA Factbook; UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016.

([173]) UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016.

([174]) EASO, Annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU 2015, n.d., p. 10; EASO, Annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU 2014, n.d., p. 15.

([175]) UNHCR, Afghanistan voluntary repatriation and border monitoring monthly update, 1 January-30 June 2016.

([176]) UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016, pp. 28-30; IDMC Afghanistan, IDP Figures Analysis; IDMC Afghanistan: New and long-term IDPs risk becoming neglected as conflict intensifies, 16 July 2015; UN News Service, Nearly 1,000 Afghans fleeing their homes daily, warns UN relief wing, 17 May 2016; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan, April 2016; AI, "My Children Will Die This Winter" - Afghanistan's Broken Promise To The Displaced, 31 May 2016; AI, The Millions Left Behind in Afghanistan, 1 June 2016; UNOCHA, Conflict Induced Displacements, 31 July 2016.



Map 4: Number of IDPs by province of origin, source: UNOCHA (as of 31 July 2016) ([177])

According to a UNHCR survey, most people flee their homes due to AGEs' ground offensives and counteroffensives by ANSF but also because of fighting between the Taliban and IS ([178]).

Although Afghanistan society is generally very poor, IDPs constitute the most vulnerable group. Some sources report that they are worse off than even low-income city dwellers as they are usually deprived access to basic services such as water and food. They leave their homes and possessions to live without family networks, employment prospects, housing or access to services ([179]). Some of them living in remote, rural areas are beyond the reach of humanitarian organisations ([180]). According to an Amnesty International Report, the Afghan government has not done enough to improve the situation of IDPs. The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation is deeply underfunded and corrupted. International aid has diminished and humanitarian organisations have difficulty staying operational while needs are growing ([181]).

Deportations

Between 2007 and 2015, 200,000 to 300,000 Afghans were deported from Iran and Pakistan annually (the vast majority from Iran) ([182]). In 2015, UNHCR reported 239,992 Afghans without documents who were to be deported from Iran. In addition, it reported 23 registered Afghan refugees (Amayesh holders) to be deported from Iran. UNHCR reported that most deportees were single men who treated Iran as a transit country on their route to Europe. A total of 88,404 Afghans were reportedly deported from Iran via Zaranj and Islam Qala between January and June 2016,

([177]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements, 31 July 2016.

([178]) UNHCR, Afghanistan conflict-induced internal displacement monthly update, July 2015.

([179]) Amnesty International, "My Children Will Die This Winter" - Afghanistan's Broken Promise To The Displaced, 31 May 2016; IDMC Afghanistan: New and long-term IDPs risk becoming neglected as conflict intensifies, 16 July 2015.

([180]) UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016, pp 28-30

([181]) Amnesty International, "My Children Will Die This Winter" - Afghanistan's Broken Promise To The Displaced, 31 May 2016; Amnesty International, The Millions Left Behind in Afghanistan, 1 June 2016

([182]) UNOCHA, The 2015 Afghanistan Refugee and Returnee Overview, n.d., p. 55.

a 20 % decrease compared to the same period in 2015. The number of deportees from Pakistan is not as high but steadily growing: in 2014, 9,122 Afghans were deported from this country; in 2015 this reached 19,330 and in the first part of the 2016 the figure was 14,786 ([183]).

There is no systematic research on the situation of rejected and deported asylum seekers from Western countries. However, certain sources indicate that most of them plan another trip abroad ([184]). In February 2016, Afghan Minister of Refugees and Repatriations Sayed Hussain Alemi Balkhi stated that Afghanistan would only take back those migrants who were willing to return to their home country voluntarily ([185]).

Voluntary return

UNHCR reported that in the first six months of 2016, 7,804 Afghans returned from Iran and Pakistan. This is the lowest figure since the start of UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme in 2002. UNHCR identified a combination of the following factors for the dip in the returns: high levels of unemployment; lack of livelihood opportunities; limited access to land, shelter and basic services; and continuous security issues. UNHCR believes the number of returns will further decline. In addition, second and third generations of refugees in Pakistan and Iran may not be interested in returning to a country that they virtually do not know. Afghans usually decide to return to Nanghahar, Kabul, Herat, Kunduz and Jawzjan provinces and most people chose to move to provincial capitals ([186]). Many of the returnees are reported by UNHCR to: 'have been unable to reintegrate into their home communities, resulting in significant secondary displacement, mostly to urban areas ([187]).'

Some Afghans decided to voluntarily return from Europe. Where in 2015, about 1,400 Afghans returned home in the framework of IOM programmes, the same number was already reached during the first three months of 2016, mainly from Germany, Austria and Sweden. In these first three months of 2016, the preferred destination of return was Herat (35%), Kabul (19%) and Balkh (12%). In 2015, Kabul was the most popular, followed by Ghazni and Balkh ([188]).

1.5.3. Children

More than half of the Afghan society are children below 18 ([189]). They belong to the most vulnerable groups of society suffering from the prolonged conflict. The number of child casualties has been steadily growing since 2009. In 2015, UNAMA reported 2,829 child casualties (733 killed and 2,096 injured) and during the first six months of 2016 there were 1,509 child casualties (388 killed and 1,121 injured). The main reasons of child casualties were: ground engagements (more than 50 %), landmine explosions (18 %), IED attacks (14 %), and aerial operations. Children were also victims of sexual violence committed by military men, including ALP, as part of a traditional, harmful practice called *bacha baazi* ([190]).

The recruitment of children by insurgent groups is a growing problem. Both Taliban and IS but also ALP and PGM use children as soldiers ([191]). The Taliban claims it does not deploy 'boys with no beards'. However, there were reports of training and deploying children for various military actions including the production and planting IEDs. Some children recruited from madrasas in Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhshan provinces were 13 or younger ([192]). UNAMA documented 48 boys recruited to ALP in 2015, and 4 till July 2016 but the organisation estimates that there are unreported cases ([193]).

([183]) UNHCR, Afghanistan voluntary repatriation and border monitoring monthly update, 1 January-31 March 2016, 31 March 2016, pp. 5-6; UNHCR, Afghanistan voluntary repatriation and border monitoring monthly update, 1 January-30 June 2016.

([184]) UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016.

([185]) Deutsche Welle, Afghanistan's Minister of Refugees: 'No agreement on taking back deportees from Germany', 2 February 2016.

([186]) UNHCR, Afghanistan voluntary repatriation and border monitoring monthly update, 1 January-30 June 2016.

([187]) UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016, pp. 31-32.

([188]) IOM, Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Quarterly Statistical Report, 1 January to 31 March 2016.

([189]) CIA, Factbook, Afghanistan, People and Society,

([190]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, pp.16-17; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, pp. 17-18, 19; *Bacha Baazi* are dancing boys: Young boys who dance and are often sexually abused. This practice is often associated with powerful men.

([191]) HRW, Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges, 17 February 2016; Frontline, Why Afghanistan's Children Are Used as Spies and Suicide Bombers, 17 November 2015; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 119.

([192]) HRW, Afghanistan: Taliban Child Soldier Recruitment Surges, 17 February 2016.

([193]) Guardian (The), My grandsons' fight to avenge their father: child soldiers in Afghanistan, 25 May 2016; Guardian (The), US military attacked for complicity in Afghan child soldiers after boy's murder, 4 February 2016.

Only 50 % of eligible children are enrolled in schools. The status of girls in education is considerably lower than boys with more cases of threats and intimidation for girls. Difficulties accessing school, especially lack of schools and teachers, resulting in long walking distances and general security fears, are reasons for the low enrolment levels ([194]). In 2015, 369 schools were closed because of security reasons which affected more than 139,000 students and 600 teachers ([195]). During the first half of 2016, UNAMA reported 46 conflict-related incidents targeting education and its personnel, a 35 % decrease compared to the same period in 2015, causing 15 civilian casualties (five deaths and 10 injured). Sometimes AGEs also try to influence the schools' curriculum and school buildings were also used for military purposes, both by ANSF and AGEs ([196]).

Landmines and IEDs are particularly threatening for children and are the second highest cause of death and injury. Some of the mines are constructed in such a way that children think they may be toys ([197]).

1.5.4. Health facilities

In 2015 and at the beginning of 2016 the number of attacks on health service facilities and its personnel increased. Hospitals and clinics were searched by ANSF and personnel intimidated and threatened, sometimes even abducted and killed. Security forces blocked the medical supplies for Taliban-controlled areas. Threats caused the closure of health facilities and some women doctors had to resign from work. During a US airstrike in Kunduz, the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital was targeted. 42 people were killed and 43 injured, including 49 medical personnel. Some other attacks on health facilities took place resulting in deaths and injuries ([198]).

AGEs reportedly attacked polio workers to prevent polio vaccination campaigns in different regions of Afghanistan. Abductions and harassment of medical staff were frequently reported ([199]).

1.6. Geographical overview of the security situation

1.6.1. Urban/rural divide

Afghanistan's history is characterised by a structural urban-rural divide. Urban centres have been hubs for administration, market-driven methods of production, taxation, education, judiciary and reforms. This helped to create resentment among the rural population, which did not benefit from these developments ([200]).

In general, Afghan urban centres are seen as more secure than rural areas and the majority of them have been controlled by the government, protecting them against insurgent attacks. That is why they attract a large proportion of the IDPs who usually live there in informal or unplanned settlements ([201]). However, in 2015, the Taliban increasingly targeted district and provincial capitals. It managed to seize some of them and control them for longer periods. In October 2015, it captured the administrative centre of Kunduz – the first provincial capital seized by the Taliban since 2001([202]). The capital of Helmand, Lashkargah, has also come under serious pressure and was completely surrounded by Taliban fighters closing in on the centre in August 2016, which led to a new deployment of US troops in the town ([203]).

([194]) UNICEF Afghanistan, Gender education and gender equality.

([195]) UNICEF, Children in Afghanistan struggle to access education and healthcare, 18 April 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Thousands of students out of school due to fighting, 31 August 2015; Tolo News, Daesh Closes Schools in Nangarhar's Achin District, 28 August 2015.

([196]) UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 21.

([197]) UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict,July 2016, p. 21; Rasad News Agency, Landmine Explosion Kill 4 Children in Kandahar Province, 9 August 2016; Daily Mail, The harrowing plight of children maimed in Afghanistan by the thousands of mines, 21 August 2015.

([198]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 65; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 22.

([199]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2015, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, August 2015, pp. 22-23.

([200]) Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, January 2012, pp. 7-8.

([201]) Asia Foundation, A Survey of Afghan People Afghanistan in 2015, November 2015, p. 38; IDMC, Afghanistan: New and long term IDPs risk becoming neglected as conflict intensifies, 16 July 2015; Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, State of Afghan cities, volume one, 2015, pp. 22-23; Latifi, Ali M., Skype interview, 7 September 2015; UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 6.

([202]) US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afganistan, December 2015, p. 17; UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 6; Frontier Post (The), MoD rejects fears of Lashkargah collapse, 30 May 2016; AL Jazeera, Afghanistan: More than 50 police killed in Helmand, 30 May 2016.

([203]) Al Jazeera, Thousands flee fierce fighting in Afghanistan's Helmand, 9 August 2016; Khaama Press, 100 American soldiers deployed to Helmand amid surge in violence, 23 August 2016.

The main security problems in big cities are high-profile attacks, target killings and kidnappings. In spite of the visible military presence in Kabul and other big cities, government, police and army are not able to prevent insurgent infiltration. Kabul, which experiences high-profile attacks on a regular basis, is now divided by security walls and road barriers but still AGEs can move through the city ([204]).

Some urban centres suffer more security problems than others, including administrative centres in Kunduz, Helmand but also in Ghazni, Uruzgan and Baghlan Province. Others including Mazar-e Sharif (Balkh Province) and Herat counted the lowest numbers of civilian victims in their city centres. However, in 2015 and 2016 some high-profile attacks were conducted in Mazar-e Sharif too ([205]).

The security situation in rural areas, where the vast majority of people live, is even more complicated. The Taliban, as well as other AGE groups, maintain their power bases in rural areas where government power is more decentralised than major cities. In rural areas, civilians may be victims caught in a cross-fire, aerial operations and land-mines or IED explosions. They may suffer also attacks from ALP and PGM ([206]). Afghans living in rural areas were significantly more likely (30.4 %) to express support for AGEs compared to residents of urban areas (18.6 %) ([207]).

1.6.2. Regional differences

There are differences in the security situation in various regions of Afghanistan. At least 29 of 34 Afghan provinces are affected by the conflict([208]) and, according to Tolo News, this was especially the case for Nangarhar, Kunduz, Kandahar, Helmand and Baghlan in the first half of 2016 ([209]).

According to a 2015 survey by the Asia Foundation, more than two-thirds of Afghans (67.4 %) report that they 'always, often, or sometimes fear for their personal safety'. The percentage of Afghans who fear for their personal safety has risen significantly since 2006. The provinces in which the population most often reports some level of fear for personal safety are: Wardak (96.2 %), Logar (90.6 %), and Uruzgan (90.4 %). For several years, these provinces have faced significantly higher levels of violence and armed insurgency than other areas. Provinces in which the people were least likely to report some level of fear are: Panjshir (7.2 %), Bamyan (18.4 %), and Badakhshan (21.7 %) ([210]).

From 2009 until 2014, UNAMA reported a steady increase in numbers of civilian victims in the central, eastern, south-eastern, northern, north-eastern and western regions. The South was already very violent from 2009-2010 and, in 2015, the increase in civilian casualties was most significant in the regions North-East and Centre ([211]).

In Figure 3, an overview of the security incidents from September 2015 to May 2016 per province is shown on a map ([212]).

([204]) US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afganistan, December 2015, pp. 17-21; Tolo News, Increasing Security Walls Irks Kabul Residents, 26 March 2016; Wytrykowska M., Afganistan sytuacja ludności cywilnej na terenach kontrolowanych przez Talibów, May 2013; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, pp. 6.

([205]) Khaama Press, Attack on Indian consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif was planned abroad, 7 January 2016; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 6; Frontier Post (The), MoD rejects fears of Lashkargah collapse, 30 May 2016; AL Jazeera, Afghanistan: More than 50 police killed in Helmand, 30 May 2016; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 6; Diplomat (The), The Battle for Helmand: Afghanistan's Largest Province May Fall Entirely to the Taliban, 11 August 2016.

([206]) UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 37, 40, 41, 77, 85, 87.

([207]) Asia Foundation, A Survey of the Afghan People Afghanistan in 2015, November 2015; US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afganistan, December 2015, p. 17; USIP, Addressing Land Conflict in Afghanistan, 27 May 2015; US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afganistan, June 2016, p. 25.

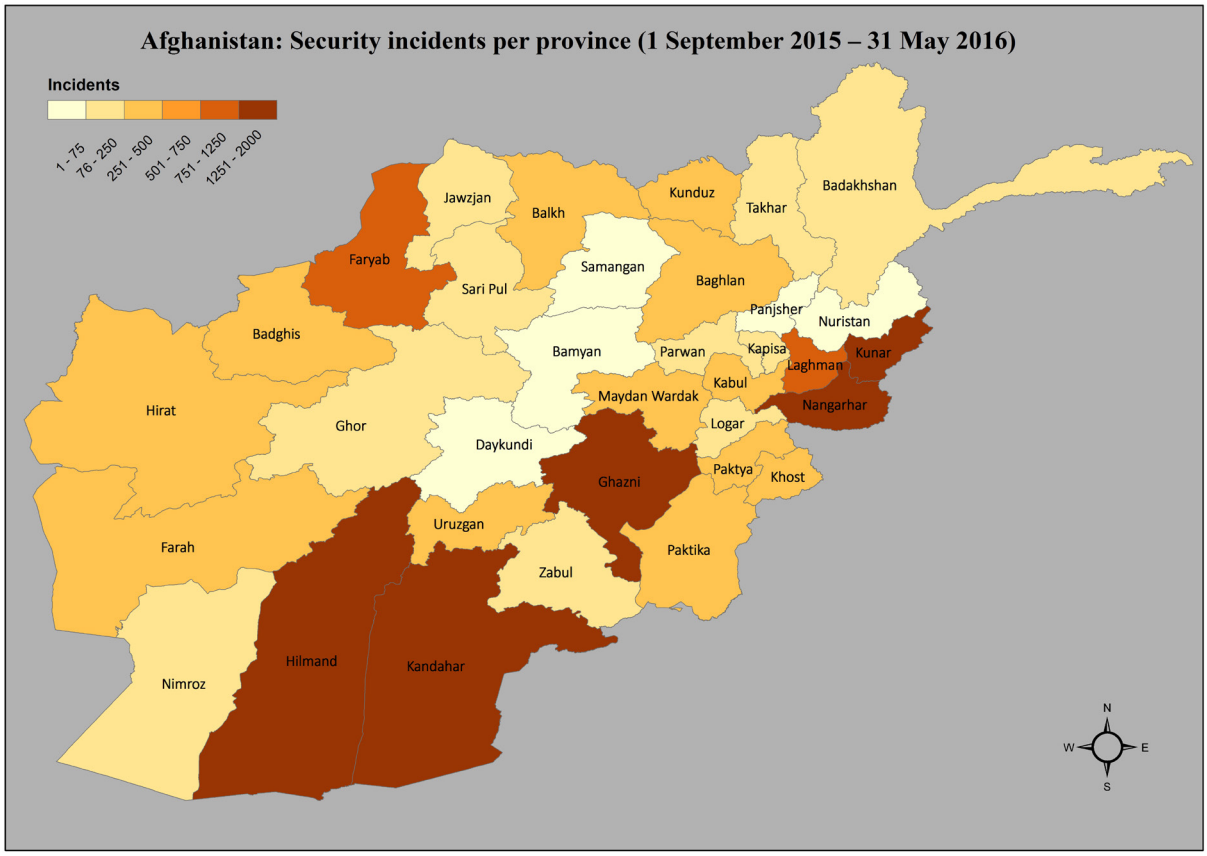
([208]) Afghan o line Press, Nearly 150,000 Afghans displaced in first six months of 2016: UN, 16 July 2016.

([209]) Tolo News, Terror Attacks Down, Casualties Up in First Six Months of 2016: Report, 17 July 2016.

([210]) Asia Foundation, A Survey of Afghan People Afghanistan in 2015, 17 November 2015, pp. 23-24, 34-40.

([211]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016 pp. 8-9

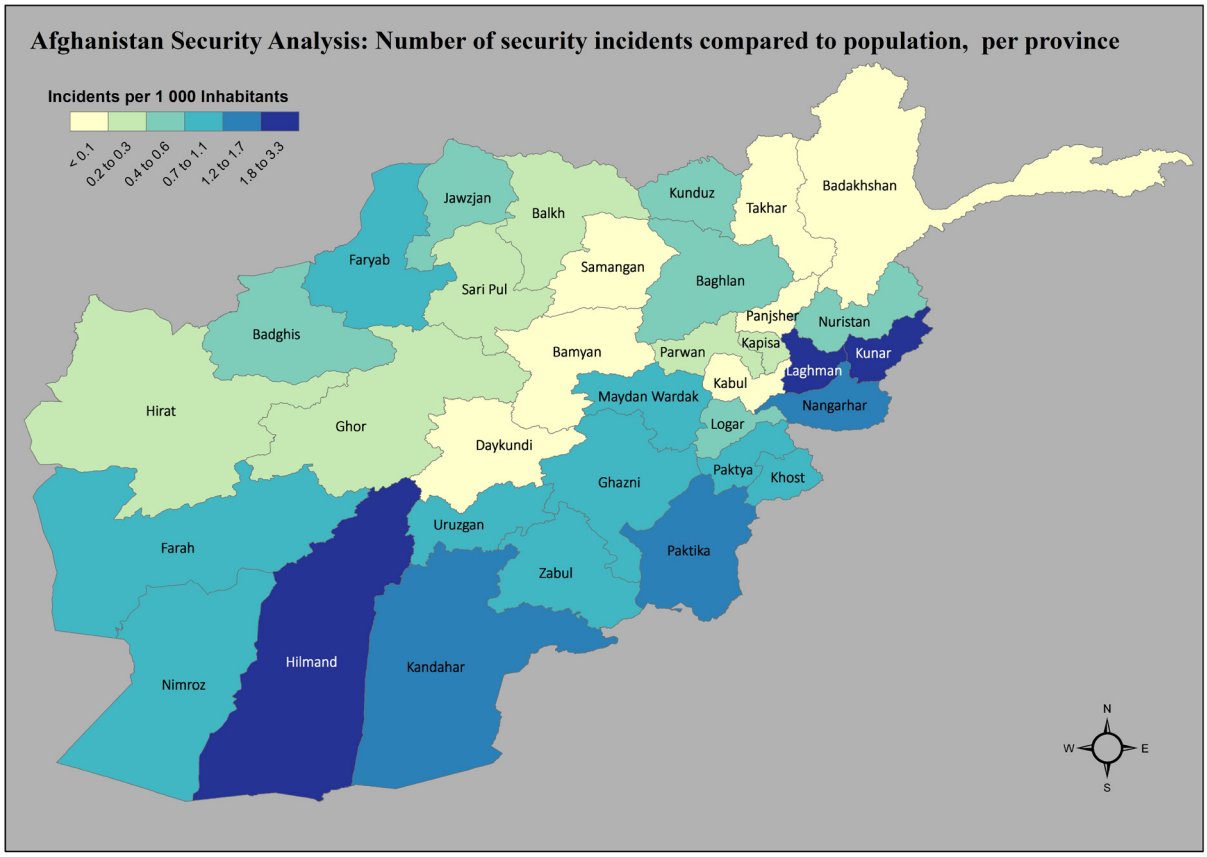
([212]) Map created by EASO: data on incidents provided by Western security official (see introduction).



Map 5: Afghanistan: Security incidents per province (Sep 2015 – May 2016)

In figure 4, an overview is given per province of how the number of violent incidents relates to the number of inhabitants, which can be used as one indicator in the assessment of the "real risk" of civilians suffering harm due to violent incidents. The reference period for security incidents is also 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016. However, this is only one possible indicator among others. The risk for an individual in a province is very complex to estimate and depends on a combination of elements, such as detailed information on the nature and target of the violent incidents, the locations where they take place, the extent of civilian casualties, etc. Further information on the violent incidents taken into account in this quantitative calculation and more information on relevant indicators can be found in each provincial part of this report under Regional description of the security situation ([213]).

([213]) Map created by EASO, sources: UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015; data on incidents provided by Western security official (see introduction).



Map 6: Afghanistan: Number of security incidents compared to population (1 Sep 2015 - 31 May 2016)

1.6.3. Road security

Since 2013, AGEs became more successful in cutting off major roads ([214]). It was reported that, since early 2014, AGEs increasingly controlled main transport and access routes. In October 2015, the Taliban blocked the major highway from Kabul to Kandahar. The road has a history of security problems and fighting, but at that time the entire road was blocked causing all traffic to be stopped ([215]). In May 2016, the Taliban blocked the road from Kabul to Mazar-e Sharif and kept it under control, systematically searching for government officials or sympathisers ([216]). Residents of Jawzjan Province have also expressed concerns over growing security threats on Shiberghan-Sar-e Pul highway ([217]). Only the short stretch between Kabul and Wardak Province is passable regularly ([218]). In August 2016, the Taliban had been blocking the Helmand-Kandahar highway for several weeks ([219]).

Due to the increased Taliban control over rural areas (see section on armed clashes and assaults under recent security trends) also smaller roads are less safe and people from some districts are cut off from the cities. Sometimes the Taliban closes roads as a military strategy because it knows that this will quickly end a siege leaving the local population with no alternative. The AGEs have closed roads in four districts of Uruzgan for this reason ([220]).

Kidnappings, hostage-taking and summary executions of civilians on roads are a serious and growing threat. For example, nearly 200 men, women and children were forcibly removed from three civilian buses on 30 May 2016 in

([214]) Münch, P. and Ruttig, T., 'Between Negotiations and Ongoing Resistance. The Situation of the Afghan Insurgency', 2014; New York Times, Taliban Cut Off Afghan Highway Linking Kabul to Northern Gateways, 14 May 2016.

([215]) Osman, B., The Road to Ghazni: Bombs, battles and blockades, 13 July 2013; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Kabul Kandahar highway remains closed off, 12 October 2015; Al Jazeera, Afghan travellers stranded after Taliban blocks highway, 14 October 2015.

([216]) New York Times, Taliban Cut Off Afghan Highway Linking Kabul to Northern Gateways, 14 May 2016.

([217]) Afghanistan Times, Reopening roads, 12 May 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Khas Uruzgan road reopens after 3 months, 9 July 2015; Van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Khas Uruzgan: Insults, assaults, a siege and an airlift, 2 September 2015.

([218]) NY Times, Taliban Cut Off Afghan Highway Linking Kabul to Northern Gateways, 14 May 2016.

([219]) New Afghan Press, Helmand-Kandahar Highway Still Remained Blocked, 21 August 2016.

([220]) Afghanistan Times, Reopening roads, 12 May 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Khas Uruzgan road reopens after 3 months, 9 July 2015; Van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Khas Uruzgan: Insults, assaults, a siege and an airlift, 2 September 2015.

Kunduz Province, and some of them were executed. In a separate incident on 1 June 2016, armed attackers abducted 25 civilian men and women who were travelling in two buses in Sar-i Pul Province. A large part of abductions concerned Hazara people ([221]).

IEDs and landmines explosions are also a serious problems on Afghan roads ([222]).

([221]) UN News Service, Afghanistan: UN mission concerned by civilian abductions and hostage-taking, 2 June 2016; UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict, July 2016, pp. 64-66.

([222]) UNAMA, Afghanistan - Midyear Report 2016, Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict,July 2016, pp. 48-50; Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Smartraveller – Afghanistan, 23 May 2015.

2. Regional description of the security situation in Afghanistan

In the following sections, security trends are explained in greater detail, per geographic subdivision (Kabul City and 34 provinces). In each provincial section a general description of the province contains information on the geography and population, on the background of the conflict, including the actors in the conflict in the province. A second part describes recent trends in the security situation, including the nature of the violence, frequency, targets, locations, and victims within a timeframe from 1 September 2015 until 31 August 2016. Finally, a separate part is dedicated to displacements.

Under the sub-sections several incidents are described. These should be read as illustrations of trends in the security situation and not as an exhaustive list of incidents.

2.1. Centre

2.1.1. Kabul City

General description of the city

The city of Kabul is a separate district in the province of Kabul, alongside 14 other districts. In this report, Kabul City is highlighted because of its prominent position as Afghanistan's capital. Because of its high concentration of government buildings, international organisations, diplomatic compounds and international and national security forces, the city has a different security outlook than most of Afghanistan's other districts and provinces ([223]).

Kabul is by far the biggest city in Afghanistan and certainly the fastest growing. Massive returnee populations, IDPs and economic migrants have spurred rapid growth in Kabul ([224]). In 2015, UN OCHA estimated the population of Kabul to be 3,678,034 inhabitants ([225]). Other estimates run as high as 7 million ([226]). More than three-quarters of Kabul Province's population lives in the city of Kabul ([227]).

The city of Kabul is subdivided into 17 districts, often referred to as districts 1 to 17 ([228]). A map of UN OCHA dated 4 January 2016, shows 22 police districts ([229]). In early 2016, the city was without mayor due to a lack of agreement between President Ghani and CEO Abdullah on the appointment ([230]).

Kabul is an ethnically diverse city with communities of almost all ethnicities. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluchs, Sikhs and Hindus all reside there ([231]) with no group clearly dominating. As people tend to move to areas where they already have family or into particular districts as part of a larger group with the same ethnicity, different neighbourhoods have become associated with different ethnic groups ([232]).

([223]) Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Human Rights and Security situation, 9 September 2011; Foschini, F., Striking at Kabul, in 2013: the attack on the traffic police HQ, 21 January 2013; Lifos, Rapport från utredningsresa till Afghanistan den 5 – 8 oktober 2013, 28 November 2013; Ruttig, T., Some things got better – how much got good? A review of 12 years of international intervention in Afghanistan, 30 December 2013; Clark K., The triple attack in Kabul: A message? If so, to whom?, 10 August 2015.

([224]) Metcalfe, V., Haysom, S. and Martin, E., Sanctuary in the city? Urban displacement and vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012 pp. 6-8; APPRO, Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accomodation?, October 2012, pp. 6-8.

([225]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([226]) Metcalfe, V., Haysom, S. and Martin, E., Sanctuary in the city? Urban displacement and vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, p. 5; APPRO, Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?, October 2012, pp. 6-8.

([227]) ACSO, Kabul Province Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey Highlights, 13 January 2015, p. 5.

([228]) ACSO, Population of Kabul city by district and sex 2012- 2013., n.d.

([229]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Informal Settlements, 4 January 2016.

([230]) Washington Post, Why disaffected young Afghans are warming to a Taliban comeback, 1 March 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 150 posts lying vacant in Kabul municipality, 11 February 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabulis lash out at municipality over clogged roads, 17 March 2016.

([231]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul Province Background Profile, n.d.

([232]) APPRO, Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?, October 2012, p. 8.

Background on the conflict and actors in Kabul City

In April 2016, UNHCR stated in its Eligibility Guidelines that 'the ANSF have proved generally adept in defending provincial capitals and major urban centres, with the chief exception of the brief capture by the Taliban of Kunduz in September 2015' ([233]). This obviously includes Kabul ([234]). Nevertheless Kabul regularly witnesses violence. The main tactics in Kabul are either 'high-profile attacks' ([235]), 'complex attacks' ([236]) or 'suicide attacks' ([237]). UNAMA defines a complex attack as 'a deliberate and coordinated attack which includes a suicide device, more than one attacker and more than one type of device' ([238]). The pattern of a complex attack is almost always the same: an explosion, often a bomb, placed in a vehicle, which creates an entrance. Then insurgent combatants rush in and provoke an often hour-long firefight with the ANSF ([239]).

The targets of these attacks have been high-profile international institutions, both military and civil – including diplomatic personnel and western NGOs, in addition to Afghan authorities and security forces ([240]). The objectives of such high-profile attacks include, apart from striking the opponent, grabbing the international media headlines in a show of strength and sending a message to the population telling them that the Afghan government cannot protect them ([241]). The weaponry used by AGEs in these attacks are generally not very sophisticated, such as assault rifles, grenades and pistols ([242]). Highprofile locations are targeted with suicide bombs and IEDs ([243]). Also, the AGEs occasionally target the city with rockets or grenades ([244]).

In Kabul, certain analysts refer to a Kabul Attack Network involved in many of the highprofile attacks. This is a network of combatants from the Haqqani Network, Hezb-e Islami, Taliban, Al Qaeda and LeT ([245]).

According to the ISW in March 2015 ([246]):

> '[t]he Haqqani Network's ratlines to Kabul lead from its sanctuaries in Pakistan's tribal areas, where the senior leadership plays an important role in selecting targets and creating an overall strategy for spectacular attacks in Kabul. Interviews with captured insurgents in Kabul in early 2015 indicate that many of them have been radicalized and trained in the tribal areas, allegedly by Haqqani operatives. Haqqani commanders serve as the key figures in the "network of networks" that the Kabul Attack Network uses to move suicide attackers, weapons, and bombmaking materials into the capital from the surrounding provinces'

Another source refers to the 'martyrdom battalion', a sort of special forces unit, carefully screened for physical ability and religious devotion. On many occasions in Kabul these attacks are traced back to the Haqqani network ([247]).

According to the ISW in March 2015 ([248]):

> '[t]he escalation of violence in Kabul is likely linked to the increase of Taliban activity in the periphery. As ISAF troops closed their forward operating bases and pulled back to provincial capitals in the transition to Resolute Support, the insurgency was able to operate with greater freedom of movement and consolidate pre-existing strongholds in areas around Kabul. The insurgency maintains safe-havens in areas abutting three major highways leading into Kabul. The Taliban can funnel weapons, funds, and fighters from these areas and along the highways

([233]) UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, 19 April 2016, p. 11.

([234]) Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan: Taliban – organisasjon, kommunikasjon og sanksjoner (del I), 13 May 2016, p. 25; US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2015, p. 17.

([235]) US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2015; Osman, Borhan, The Fall of Kunduz: What does it tell us about the strength of the post-Omar Taleban?, 30 September 2015.

([236]) NY Times (the), Taliban Step Up Urban Assaults, Testing the Mettle of Afghan Forces, 9 January 2016.

([237]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2015, February 2016, p. 6.

([238]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016, July 2016, p. 4.

([239]) NY Times (the), Taliban Step Up Urban Assaults, Testing the Mettle of Afghan Forces, 9 January 2016.

([240]) Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan: Generell sikkerhet og veisikkerhet, 20 November 2015, p. 14; ISW, The Taliban Resurgent: Threats to Afghanistan's Security, March 2015, pp. 17-18.

([241]) NY Times (the), Taliban Step Up Urban Assaults, Testing the Mettle of Afghan Forces, 9 January 2016; New Yorker (the), Not Even Kabul is Safe from the Taliban, 19 April 2016; Van Bijlert, M., A Shaken City: On the Taleban's truck-bomb attack in Kabul, 21 April 2016.

([242]) NY Times (the), Taliban Step Up Urban Assaults, Testing the Mettle of Afghan Forces, 9 January 2016.

([243]) UNGASC, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security; Report of the Secretary-General, 10 June 2015, p. 4.

([244]) Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan: Generell sikkerhet og veisikkerhet, 20 November 2015, p. 14.

([245]) Roggio, B., Taliban continue to launch suicide assaults in Kabul, 29 March 2014; ISW, The Taliban Resurgent: Threats to Afghanistan's Security, March 2015, p. 18; Roggio, B., US military searches for Kabul Attack Network members, 27 April 2016.

([246]) ISW, The Taliban Resurgent: Threats to Afghanistan's Security, March 2015, p. 18.

([247]) NY Times (the), Taliban Step Up Urban Assaults, Testing the Mettle of Afghan Forces, 9 January 2016.

([248]) ISW, The Taliban Resurgent: Threats to Afghanistan's Security, March 2015, p. 18.

in order to support operations in Kabul. The Taliban's ability to reinforce the Kabul Attack Network is made easier by an ineffective ANSF presence around the capital. With their limited capabilities, Afghan forces are reportedly struggling to maintain an adequate level of security on the roadways leading into Kabul'

One attack on a Shi'ite religious congregation in October 2015 was claimed by the Islamic State ([249]).

Apart from conflict-related violence, Kabul City sees a high and rising crime rate. Regularly, the Afghan police parade hundreds of criminals in one month in Kabul, involved in, for example, murder, armed robbery and car jackings ([250]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Kabul City counted 151 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([251]):

Violence targeting individuals	21
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	18
Explosions	50
Security enforcement	31
Non-conflict related incidents	28
Other incidents	3
Total security incidents	**151**

The Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) compiled all major incidents that happened in Kabul for the last few years ([252]). Here follows a non-exhaustive listing of incidents for the reporting period September 2015 to August 2016 according to this ACCORD-compilation and, where referenced differently, completed with other sources. In September 2015, a police officer was killed by a MIED attached to his car. The same month, the head of the ALP in Logar was shot. In October 2015, at least seven policemen were injured in an attack on the adjacent houses of a tribal elder and the former governor of Helmand ([253]). One civilian was killed and three wounded in an attack on a religious congregation site in the Chendawol area. In the same month, an attack on a restaurant was thwarted by the security forces killing two suicide bombers. A convoy of UK military vehicles was targeted with an IED causing seven victims but not hitting the intended target. In November 2015, a former diplomat and political analyst was shot. In the same month, an election commission official was targeted by a suicide attack which killed a security guard and injured his driver. In December 2015, a complex attack on an international guesthouse near the Spanish embassy killed four Afghan policemen and two Spanish guards and injured seven others. A suicide car bomber targeted a convoy of IMF near the airport but instead killed at least one civilian. At the start of 2016, a suicide bomber targeted the French restaurant, Le Jardin, killing two Afghan civilians, including a child, and injuring 18 more ([254]). The next day a compound for foreign contractors near the airport was targeted with a truck bomb, killing one civilian and wounding 22. A magnetic bomb was attached to a car in Wazir Abkar Khan, and a driver exploded his suicide vest when stopped at a checkpoint near the airport but failed to detonate his car bomb ([255]). In January 2016, a minibus carrying personnel of Tolo News TV station was targeted by a suicide bomber after the Taliban declared Tolo News a military target for reporting the events in Kunduz in September 2015. In this incident at least seven people wer killed and 25 injured. In February 2016, the headquarters of the ANCOP were targeted by a suicide bomber, killing 20 police officers and injuring 29. The same month, another suicide bomber targeted the ministry of Defense, killing 12 people and wounding eight others including many civilians. In March 2016, a bomb targeted a former senator in the Panjshir Watt area, but instead killed a man, woman and two children, all pedestrians, and wounded 15 ([256]). Security forces thwarted an attack on the house of the head of the NDS and

([249]) Khaama Press, ISIS claims responsibility for the attack on a religious hall in Kabul, 10 October 2015.

([250]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 569 criminals detained in one month in Kabul, 12 September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul police parade 400 crime suspects, weapons, 10 January 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 277 detained in Kabul over various crime, 11 May 2016.

([251]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([252]) ACCORD, ecoi.net featured topic on Afghanistan: General Security Situation in Afghanistan and Events in Kabul, last update 11 May 2016; ACCORD, ecoi.net featured topic on Afghanistan: General Security Situation in Afghanistan and Events in Kabul, last update 5 July 2016.

([253]) Khaama Press, Suicide attack rocks capital Kabul, 5 October 2015.

([254]) UNAMA, UNAMA condemns Taliban attacks in Kabul city that kill five and injure 56, 6 January 2016.

([255]) Tolo News, 1 killed, 30 wounded in Kabul car bomb, 4 January 2016; NY Times (The), Bombings near Kabul Airport add to String of Attacks around Afghan Capital, 4 January 2016; UNAMA, UNAMA condemns Taliban attacks in Kabul city that kill five and injure 56, 6 January 2016.

([256]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 killed, 15 wounded in bomb attack on ex-senator, 29 March 2016.

against the Ministry of Interior in May 2016 ([257]). In April 2016, a magnetic bomb was attached to a bus carrying Ministry of Education personnel, killing one person and wounding five ([258]). On 19 April 2016, a truck bomb exploded and targeted a former NDS building housing a unit tasked with the close protection of senior government officials and VIPs. The attack resulted in at least 68 dead and 347 wounded. As the explosion took place in a civilian area, next to a bus stop, the vast majority of the dead and wounded were civilians. This attack recalls in magnitude and method the attack in the Shah Shahid neighborhood in August 2015 ([259]). In May 2016, NDS shot a suicide bomber before he could reach his target ([260]). A retired judge was gunned down in Kart-e Naw ([261]). In June 2016, an Afghan MP was killed in an explosion near his house ([262]). In June 2016, 14 Nepali security guards were killed after a suicide bomber hit a minibus in Kabul ([263]). In August 2016, AGEs conducted a complex attack against the American university of Kabul, killing 13 people, including students and a professor, and injuring dozens of others ([264]).

The most deadly attack happened on 23 July 2016, when two explosions targeted a demonstration by members of the mainly Shi'ite Hazara minority in Kabul. This attack resulted in at least 80 dead and 230 wounded. Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. This was one of the worst attacks in many years in terms of casualties in Kabul ([265]).

In January 2016, the Italian embassy was targeted by a rocket and in March 2016 three rockets were fired at the Parliament building, both incidents without casualties ([266]). During a visit of US Secretary of State in April, several rockets exploded outside the Presidential Palace and outside the US Embassy. This attack led to no casualties, but a girls' school was hit ([267]). Another girls' school was torched after the guard was killed in Kabul. This is reportedly the first such incident in Kabul ([268]).

Displacement

Kabul City continues to attract significant numbers of displaced persons, with at least 3,000 families requiring assistance in the first quarter of 2016 ([269]). In the first three months of 2016, 2,800 IDPs were registered in Kabul ([270]).

In the UNHCR Monthly Updates on Conflict Induced Displacement from September 2015 to November 2015, Kabul is not mentioned as a province of origin for conflict induced IDPs, only as province of arrival of certain IDP movements from other provinces. IDPs choose Kabul largely due to the perception of a better security situation and the hope to find better coping mechanisms ([271]).

IDPs in Kabul City originate from neighbouring districts and other provinces from the central region such as Kapisa, Wardak and Logar, but also from Kunduz and Nangarhar. During the crisis in Kunduz, Kabul saw a major influx of IDPs from that province. Most found refuge with family or friends, but many did not and were scattered around the city. Most of the IDPs from Kunduz returned quickly after the city was retaken by government forces ([272]).

The total number of IDPs in Kabul is unknown. There are different categories of IDPs: those fleeing armed conflict and security problems, returnees who could not return to their place of origin and live in secondary displacement, people fleeing natural disaster and nomads such as Kuchi and Jogi. 40 % of returnees do not or cannot return to their

([257]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Explosives laden car seized near Interior ministry in Kabul, 17 May 2016.

([258]) ACCORD, ecoi.net featured topic on Afghanistan: General Security Situation in Afghanistan and Events in Kabul, last update 11 May 2016.

([259]) Van Bijlert, M., A Shaken City: On the Taleban's truck-bomb attack in Kabul, 21 April 2016; Graham-Harrison, E., Kabul car bomb reminds us this bloody conflict is no nearer an ending, 19 April 2016.

([260]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Suicide bomber shot dead in Kabul, NDS, 28 May 2016.

([261]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Judge gunned down by unidentified assailants in Kabul, 20 May 2016.

([262]) ACCORD, ecoi.net featured topic on Afghanistan: General Security Situation in Afghanistan and Events in Kabul, last update 7 July 2016.

([263]) ACCORD, ecoi.net featured topic on Afghanistan: General Security Situation in Afghanistan and Events in Kabul, last update 7 July 2016.

([264]) CNN, Kabul university attack: 13 killed as gunmen open fire on campus, 25 August 2016; Fox News, At least 13 killed, 36 wounded in attack on American University in Afghanistan, 25 August 2016.

([265]) Reuters, Islamic State claims responsibility for Kabul attack, 80 dead, 24 July 2016.

([266]) ACCORD, ecoi.net featured topic on Afghanistan: General Security Situation in Afghanistan and Events in Kabul, last update 11 May 2016.

([267]) Al Jazeera, Rockets hit Afghan capital after Kerry visit, 9 April 2016; Tolo News, Rocket attack targets girls school in Kabul, 10 April 2016.

([268]) Tolo News, Gunmen kill security guard, torch girls school in Kabul, 18 January 2016.

([269]) UNGASC, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security; Report of the Secretary-General, 10 December 2015, p. 13.

([270]) UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Conflict Induced Displacements - Snapshot (1 January - 31 March 2016), 16 May 2016; UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Conflict Induced Displacements - Snapshot (1 January – 30 April 2016), 16 May 2016.

([271]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement in 2015: the Year in Review, 28 April 2016, p. 9.

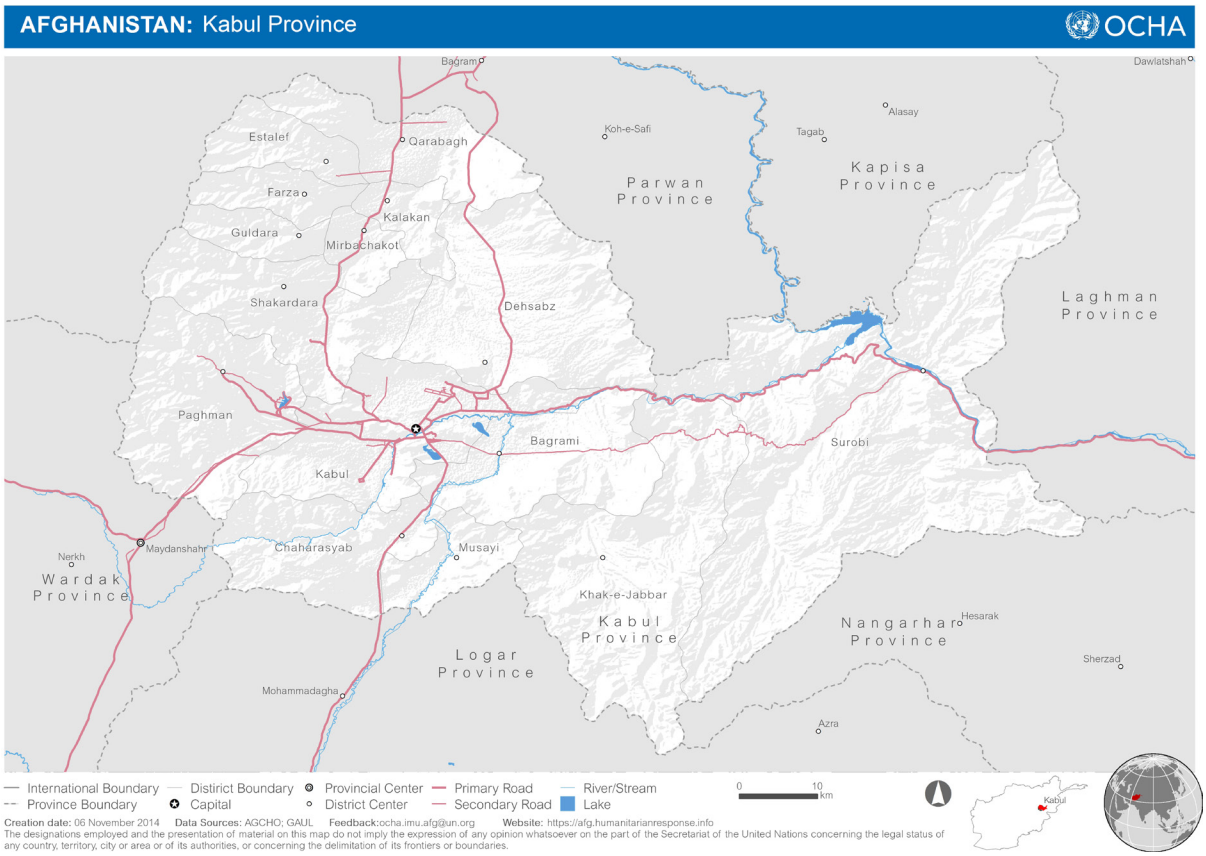
([272]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, September 2015; UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, October 2015; UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, November 2015; UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement in 2015: the Year in Review [map], 28 April 2016, p. 9.

place of origin. IDPs in Kabul do not necessarily live separated from the other urban dwellers and often mingle with other vulnerable groups such as the urban poor, returnees and economic migrants. Most IDPs settle in informal and illegal settlements around the city. Informal settlements are not in accordance with the Kabul City Master Plan, but based on agreements between the owner and the residents. It is estimated that 70 % to 80 % of Kabul is 'informal'. As these families pay taxes, they have better access to services. Illegal settlements have sprung up in places where there has not been an agreement with the land owner, often the Afghan state. They are often referred to 'Kabul Informal Settlements' or KIS, which include some of the poorest and most vulnerable households in the city ([273]). As of January 2016, UNOCHA counted 48 such settlements with almost 55,000 inhabitants ([274]).

Apart from internal displacement due to the conflict in Afghanistan, Kabul City saw large flows of Afghan refugees returning from neighbouring countries, putting further strain on the city's services. At the same time, humanitarian aid over recent ears decreased resulting in less support and services, traditionally provided for by NGOs ([275]).

2.1.2. Kabul Province

General description of the province



Kabul Province is made up of 15 districts with the district of Kabul City at the centre: Bagrami, Chaharasyab, Deh Sabz, Istalif, Farza, Guldara, Kabul, Kalakan, Khake Jabbar, Mir Bacha Kot, Musayi, Paghman, Qarabagh, Shakardara, Surobi ([276]). The province is estimated to have 4,372,977 inhabitants, of which 3,678,034 live in Kabul City ([277]).

Kabul Province is located in the Central Region and is bordered by the provinces of Parwan to the northwest, Kapisa to the northeast, Laghman in the east, Nangarhar in the southeast, Logar in the south, and Wardak in the southwest. More than half of the province is mountainous or semimountainous terrain while more than one third of the area

([273]) Metcalfe, V., Haysom, S. and Martin, E., Sanctuary in the city? Urban displacement and vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, p. 6; AAN, Afghanistan's Returning Refugees: Why Are So Many Still landless?, 29 March 2016.

([274]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Informal Settlements, 4 January 2016.

([275]) USIP, The Forces return of Afghan Refugees and Implications for Stability, January 2016; AAN, Afghanistan's Returning Refugees: Why Are So Many Still landless?, 29 March 2016.

([276]) Humanitarian Response, AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012.

([277]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

is made up of flat land ([278]). Major roads depart from Kabul City north toward Kunduz and Mazar-e Sharif through the districts of Shakardara, Mir Bacha Kot, Kalakan and Qarabagh in the Shomali plain, east to Jalalabad through the districts of Bagrami, Khak-e Jabbar and Surobi and south to Kandahar through Paghman and to Pul-i Alam and Gardez through Bagrami and Chahar Asayab ([279]).

Major ethnic groups in Kabul Province are Tajik, Pashtun and Hazara. According to UNHCR district profiles dating from 2002, Pashtuns dominate the southern and eastern districts of Surobi, Paghman, Chaharasyab, Bagrami, Deh Sabz, Khake Jabbar and Musayi, and Tajik dominate the northern districts of Istalif, Kalakan, Mir Bacha Kot, Shakardara and Qarabagh. In other districts, no ethnic group is clearly dominant ([280]). North of Kabul City lies the Shomali plain which stretches for 70 kilometres from the outskirts of the city to the Salang pass. The inhabitants of the Shomali plain are mainly Tajik and, to a lesser extent, Uzbek, Hazara and Pashtun ([281]). It is a fertile and comparatively rich area and, because of its developed agriculture, considered the orchard of Kabul. The area has been a central part in Afghan economy and politics for a long time ([282]). The security situation in Kabul City is outlined in the previous chapter.

Background on the conflict and actors in Kabul Province

Surobi or Sarobi district is particularly affected by Taliban infiltration ([283]). In Surobi, most of the heavy fighting between AGEs and French military forces happened in the Uzbin valley. Uzbin is a side valley in Surobi on the way to Jalalabad. The valley extends for some 30 kilometres north of the district centre and the highway that crosses it. Security incidents on the stretch of the highway passing by the mouth of the valley were frequent. Uzbin is nestled among other insecure districts, such as Tagab of Kapisa Province, Qarghayi and Badpakh of Laghman and Hesarak in Nangarhar, to which it connects through relatively easily traversable passes. The broader area is reported as being increasingly controlled by the armed opposition and became an important crossing point and sanctuary for AGEs ([284]). Residents of the upper Uzbin valley complained in September 2015 about poor economic circumstances, violence against women and the lack of professional teachers because of the presence of AGEs ([285]).

Analyst Foschini stated in July 2015 '[r]ecently, security on the [Kabul-Jalalabad] highway has deteriorated again, with recurrent attacks against ANSF posts and vehicles even in broad daylight. Most [incidents] happened where the road abuts the mouth of the Uzbin valley' ([286]). The rising security risks on that road led to a major offensive by ANSF in September 2015 ([287]). The operation lasted for several weeks and went all the way up in the Uzbin valley ([288]). However, according to Foschini, [p]revious military operations to improve security mostly aimed at dislodging insurgent groups from the Tor Ghar massif to the south of the highway (right on the border between Laghman and Nangrahar), and were temporarily effective at reducing attacks on the road. The threat coming from Uzbin, however, in light of the strong position held by AGEs there, will be much more difficult to address ([289]).

According to Foschini, in July 2015 'security observers report declining numbers of ANSF troops and decreased effectiveness of the ANSF operations in Sarobi, due to a lack of resources and poor coordination. […] The government's sway over the whole of Sarobi had grown weaker in recent years. Not only is all of upper Uzbin completely beyond the control of the ANSF; other areas in the districts do not fare much better' ([290]).

Other districts were also infiltrated by AGEs, and to a lesser extent so were Musayi, Chahar Asyab, Khak-e Jabbar and Bagrami ([291]). Musayi and parts of Deh Sabz are described by ISW as 'high confidence Taliban support zones', while Paghman and parts of Khak-e Jabbar, Bagrami and Chahar Asayab are described as 'low confidence Taliban

([278]) WFP, Provincial Profile. Kabul, n.d.

([279]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan. Kabul Province District Atlas, April 2014.

([280]) UNHCR, Kabul District Profiles, 2002.

([281]) OSI, Casting Shadows: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity: 1978-2001, 2005, p. 127.

([282]) Foschini, F., Elections 2014 (6): Two types of security in Shomali, 7 April 2014.

([283]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([284]) Foschini F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, 9 July 2015; APPRO, Afghanistan: Monitoring Women's Security in Transition, June 2013, p. 20; Pajhwok Afghan News, Hesarak on the verge of falling to rebels, 12 July 2014.

([285]) Tolo News, Security officials take steps to rid Surobi of Taliban, 30 September 2015.

([286]) Foschini F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, 9 July 2015.

([287]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Operation begins secure Kabul-Jalalabad highway, 15 September 2015.

([288]) Tolo News, Security officials take steps to rid Surobi of Taliban, 30 September 2015.

([289]) Foschini F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, 9 July 2015.

([290]) Foschini F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, 9 July 2015.

([291]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

support zones'([292]). Paghman, bordering Wardak, is described as a safe shelter for illegal armed groups and AGEs ([293]). Paghman is, nevertheless, an attractive spot for picnics and weekends out for many Kabulis ([294]). Taliban presence in Musayi and Guldara go underreported, according to analyst Thomas Ruttig ([295]).

AGEs active in the province include the Taliban, Haqqani Network and Hezb-e Islam ([296]). According to analyst Foschini, fighters from Hezb-e Islami (Hekmatyar) and the Taliban were consistently present in Surobi, although Hezb-e Islami were traditionally stronger in Surobi ([297]). According to a source in Kabul, it is tensions between Jamiaat and Hezb-e Islami that facilitate insurgent infiltration in Surobi ([298]). In November 2015, NDS claimed to have arrested four members of the Islamic State, sent to Paghman from Achin, Nangarhar ([299]).

According to a source in Kabul, 350 ALP are deployed in three districts – Surobi (150 men), Musayi and Paghman (100 men each) ([300]). In Surobi, according to Foschini, 'ALP units man a handful of posts besides the district centre bazaar, but are too small (four to five, at most ten, local policemen) to withstand attacks by the insurgents' ([301]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Kabul Province, including the city, counted 312 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([302]):

	Including Kabul City	Excluding Kabul City
Violence targeting individuals	26	5
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	107	89
Explosions	80	30
Security enforcement	67	36
Non-conflict related incidents	29	1
Other incidents	3	0
Total security incidents	**312**	**161**

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Kabul Province experienced 312 security incidents. These include 151 in Kabul City alone. Excluding the figures for Kabul City, as discussed in the previous chapter, Kabul Province only accounts for 161 incidents. While suicide attacks and IED explosions are much less common in the province than in the city, the majority of armed clashes and stand-off attacks occurred in the province. Another remarkable difference is that almost all of the non-conflict related incidents, mainly crime-related incidents, occurred in the city.

([292]) ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of April 12, 2016, 12 April 2016; ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of February 23, 2016, 23 February 2016.

([293]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([294]) Tolo News, Visitors continue to flock to Paghman, despite deadly attack, 18 September 2015.

([295]) Ruttig T., the second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expending territorial control, 3 September 2015.

([296]) Münch, P. and Ruttig, T., 'Between Negotiations and Ongoing Resistance. The Situation of the Afghan Insurgency', 2014, pp. 25-41.

([297]) Foschini F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, 9 July 2015.

([298]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([299]) Pajhwok Afghan News, NDS arrests 4 Daesh affiliates in Paghman, 26 November 2016.

([300]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([301]) Foschini F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, 9 July 2015.

([302]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Kabul Province ([303]):

Surobi	86	Chaharasyab	3
Paghman	21	Shakardara	3
Qarabagh	14	Kalakan	2
Bagrami	11	Farza	0
Deh Sabz	8	Istalif	0
Khak-e Jabbar	7	Mir Bacha Kot	0
Musayi	6	Guldara	0

Examples of violent incidents reported in the media point to a similar pattern as in Kabul City: roadside or suicide bombs with high-profile targets. North of Kabul, two soldiers died when their truck hit a landmine in Kalakan district in September 2015 ([304]). A few days later, a car bomb targeted the car of the son of a member of parliament in Qarabagh district, injuring one bodyguard ([305]). In Paghman, AGEs also occasionally targeted high profiles. In September 2015, a suicide bomber targeted the police headquarters killing four people, including the head of Criminal Investigation Department, and injuring 41, mostly civilians ([306]). In November 2015, Khaama Press reported that the Taliban was mobilising in Deh Sabz district while NDS stated the Deh Sabz shadow district governor was killed in fighting in Behsud, Nangarhar ([307]). In May 2016, a suicide bomber targeted a minibus carrying Wardak court personnel in Paghman, killing 11 people and injuring 10. According to UNAMA, six victims where children ([308]). In June 2016, a prosecutor was abducted and killed in Qarabagh district ([309]).

In Khak-e Jabar, a roadside bomb went off in September without an apparent target, killing four civilians and wounding seven; all victims were travelling from Logar to Kabul ([310]).

As of June 2016, the ISW considered a pocket south of the Kabul-Jalalabad highway as under control of the Taliban, and the surrounding areas, including the area through which the highway passes, are considered 'high confidence Taliban support zones' ([311]).

Displacement

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, reported throughout 2015 'a continuous influx' of families fleeing the intensification of the conflict between the Taliban and Islamic State-affiliated groups in Nangarhar, particularly in Surobi, and a 'steady pace' of conflict-induced displacement from neighbouring provinces Kapisa, Wardak and Parwan ([312]).UNHCR also reported an unknown number of IDPs from unnamed districts in Kabul towards Kabul City ([313]).

([303]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([304]) Khaama Press, Two soldiers martyred in landmine explosion in Kalakan district of Kabul, 9 September 2015.

([305]) Khaama Press, Car bomb goes off in Kabul's Qarabagh district, 12 September 2015.

([306]) Khaama Press, Four killed and 41 wounded in Kabul suicide attack, 16 September 2015.

([307]) Khaama Press, Taliban shadow governor for Kabul's Deh Sabz district among five killed, 22 November 2015.

([308]) UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), UNAMA condemns attack targeting judicial authorities, 25 May 2016.

([309]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016, July 2016, p. 61.

([310]) Khaama Press, Four civilians killed, seven wounded in landmine explosion in Kabul's Khak-e-Jabar, 19 September 2015.

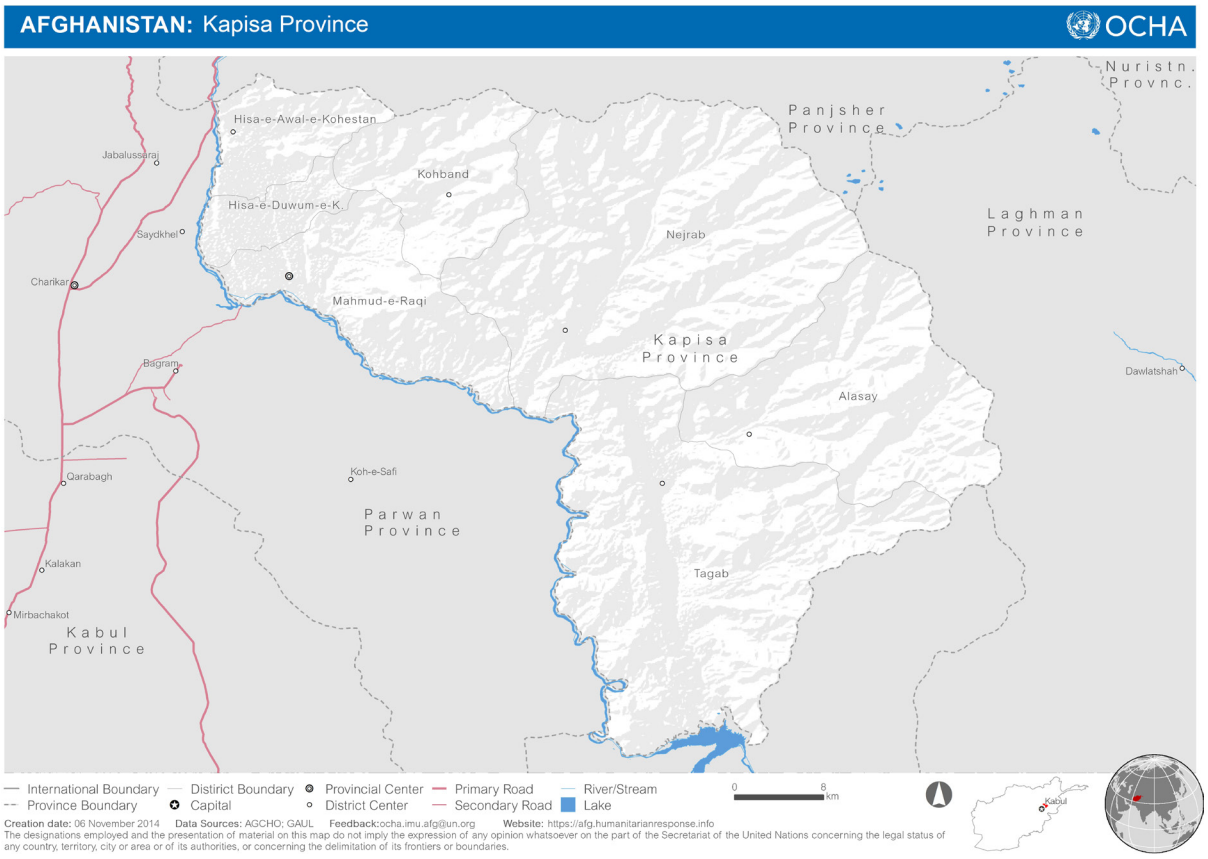
([311]) ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of April 12, 2016, 12 April 2016; ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of February 23, 2016, 23 February 2016; ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of June 30, 2016, 14 July 2016.

([312]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement in 2015: the Year in Review, 28 April 2016, p. 9.

([313]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, September 2015.

2.1.3. Kapisa

General description of the province



Kapisa is a province in central Afghanistan. According to OCHA, the population is 441,010 ([314]). Kapisa is bordered by Panjshir, Laghman, Kabul and Parwan provinces and is divided into seven districts: Tagab, Nejrab, Alasay, Mahmud-e Raqi, Hisa-e Awal-e Kohestan, Hisa-e Duwum-e Kohestan, and Koh Band ([315]). The capital is Mahmud-e Raqi. The province comprises diverse ethnic groups, mainly Tajik, also Pashtun, Pashai, Hazara, Nuristani and Kuchi ([316]). Tajik live predominantly in the northern districts of Mahmud-e Raqi, Hisa-e Awal-e Kohestan, Hisa-e Duwum-e Kohestan and Nejrab, while Pashtun predominantly live in Tagab and also Nejrab. Pashai live predominantly in Alasay and Kohband ([317]). Agriculture is the main source of income ([318]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Kapisa

According to Fabrizio Foschini, Kapisa is sociologically divided between a southern part where the population sympathises with the AGEs and a northern part, loyal to Jamiat-e Islami making community support for the Taliban less likely ([319]).

According to Obaid Ali in April 2015, the three worst districts, security-wise, were Alasai, Tagab and Nejrab ([320]). In 2015, these southern districts accounted for most of the incidents causing civilian casualties in Kapisa ([321]). The southern district Tagab is connected to the districts of Surobi in Kabul and Badpakh in Laghman through relatively easily traversable passes. Therefore the broader area became an important crossing point and sanctuary for AGEs

([314]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015, 26 August 2015.

([315]) MRRD, Kapisa Provincial Profile, March 2014.

([316]) Tolo News, Provincial Profile: Kapisa, n.d.

([317]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([318]) ISW, Regional Command East, n.d.

([319]) Foschini, F., In Kabul's Shadow: the attacks in the provinces on 15-16 April, 24 April 2012.

([320]) Ali, O., Fire in Pashai Hills: a two-district case study from Kapisa, 6 April 2015.

([321]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

moving deeper into Afghanistan from the border area ([322]). Infiltration through this 'Tagab-Surobi corridor', but also resentment at the dominance in provincial politics and security organs of northern Tajiks, fuelled the insurgency in Kapisa ([323]). The Taliban was said to control a crucial stretch of a highway leading into Kabul ([324]).

In recent years the Taliban was said to be a disciplined force that has been able to operate freely and with an exacting ability to issue and execute orders in southern Kapisa ([325]). In 2014 and early 2015, it was reported that in Tagab and Alasay, the Taliban control was such that ANSF were allowed by the Taliban to go out of their bases only one hour a day to go to the bazaar, unarmed ([326]). In April 2015, Obaid Ali stated that the Taliban had established an administrative system governing Alasay district, including a military council, a finance department and even a detention centre ([327]). In Tagab, Alasay and Nejrab, the government was said to 'operate in the shadows' ([328]). Tagab and Alasay judiciary moved to the provincial capital because of security risks ([329]). Instead, the Taliban was running courts in mosques or private houses ([330]). Insurgent presence and security problems in Tagab, Alasay and parts of Nejrab also prevented humanitarian access to the population ([331]). Residents of Tagab and Alasay complained about the lack of medical facilities, posing serious problems, especially for pregnant women ([332]). In 2015, the 201st ANA army corps was also active in Tagab, according to Pajhwok Afghan News ([333]).

In Alasay, powerbrokers linked to the Jamiat-e Islami staged an uprising against the Taliban in July 2014 but without support from the government or the ANSF, this uprising failed. The Taliban took control over the villages where the uprising started and burnt the houses of the families of the commanders ([334]). A *tashkeel* of 700 ALP was allocated to Kapisa, 300 to Tagab and Alasay each and 100 to Nejrab. There were concerns about accountability and the capture of the ALP programme by particular strongmen and political factions. In Alasay, the ALP remains cantoned in the ANA base in the district centre because of security fears ([335]).

After Islamic State fighters came under increasing pressure in Nangarhar, rumours spread about an IS presence in Tagab in of December 2015. Government sources said IS was distributing night letters and an IED carrying the flag of IS was defused in the bazaar ([336]).

Violence in the northern districts is more linked to political tensions between Hezb-e Islami and Jamiaat-e Islami ([337]). Kohband, despite not hosting many supporters of the Taliban, is also said to host a variety of illegal armed groups that carry out assassinations and targeted killing on a daily basis, according to Obaid Ali. Commanders affiliated to Hezb-e Islami and Jamiaat-e Islami continuously fight each other. In the Durnama valley of the district, a lasting feud between competing commanders has disrupted people's lives. Girls are said to be kept at home from school because parents fear they might be get caught in fire fights and schools often close altogether ([338]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Kapisa Province counted 126 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([339]):

([322]) Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, 9 July 2015.

([323]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([324]) NY Times (The), Hour's Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014.

([325]) NY Times (The), Hour's Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014.

([326]) Ali, O., Fire in Pashai Hills: a two-district case study from Kapisa, 6 April 2015; NY Times (The), Hour's Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014.

([327]) Ali, O., Fire in Pashai Hills: a two-district case study from Kapisa, 6 April 2015.

([328]) NY Times (The), Hour's Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014; Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015.

([329]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([330]) Ali, O., Fire in Pashai Hills: a two-district case study from Kapisa, 6 April 2015; NY Times (The), Hour's Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014.

([331]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kapisa Province Humanitarian Profile, June 2015.

([332]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Alasai, Tagab residents desperate for health facilities, 17 December 2015.

([333]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 Taliban, 2 ANA troops killed in Tagab offensive, 3 October 2015.

([334]) Ali, O., Fire in Pashai Hills: a two-district case study from Kapisa, 6 April 2015.

([335]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([336]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 Daesh fighters dead in airstrike, clash with Taliban, 28 December 2015.

([337]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([338]) Ali, O., Fire in Pashai Hills: a two-district case study from Kapisa, 6 April 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians suffer from fight between illegal armed groups, 24 April 2015.

([339]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

Violence targeting individuals	6
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	96
Explosions	16
Security enforcement	8
Non-conflict related incidents	0
Other incidents	0
Total security incidents	**126**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Kapisa Province ([340]):

Tagab	57	Hisa-I Duwum-e Kohestan	4
Nejrab	38	Koh Band	1
Mahmud-e Ragi	16	Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan	0
Alasay	10		

In the provincial capital, ANSF defused a car bomb in January 2016 ([341]) and a bomb exploded in May 2016 in front of a teachers' training centre, wounding 6 civilians ([342]).

In the rest of the province in September 2015, two Taliban commanders from Tagab who had travelled to Nangarhar to fight the Islamic State were killed. The ALP commander for the district stated that the security had improved since ([343]). Nevertheless, in October 2015 the situation in both Tagab and Alasay became very unstable. At the start of the month, the 201st ANA army corps conducted a large-scale operation in Tagab district, called 'Khanjar 13'. Several AGEs and two or three ANA soldiers were killed in the fighting that lasted for at least four days. A provincial council member quoted by Pajhwok stated local residents suffered material loss ([344]). A few days later, AGEs staged a large-scale attack on the Alasay district centre. The attack was repulsed by ANSF and AGEs suffered heavy losses. According to local residents quoted by Pajhwok, about 12 civilians also suffered casualties. In an incident where rockets hit a residential house, two family members were killed and three, including a woman, were wounded ([345]). A few days later fighting erupted again in Tagab, when AGEs captured and torched several checkpoints. About 130 local families fled the conflict to Kabul ([346]). In the subsequent operation to retake their positions, ANSF killed several AGEs ([347]). In the fighting that followed for days, a rocket hit a mosque during Friday prayers and several civilians were injured by shrapnel ([348]). In the following days AGEs staged another attack on the Alasay district centre but were repelled again. Local officials claimed the attack was staged by 2,000 Taliban and that they killed at least 30 of them ([349]). After weeks of fighting, the government claimed to have killed 60 AGEs and wounded 120 more. Hundreds of families were displaced by the violence ([350]).

In December 2015, the violence spread to Nejrab, where ANSF and ALP staged several clearing operations against the AGEs. In return, AGEs burned the houses of certain ALP members, causing many of them to flee the district ([351]).

In January 2016, the fighting resumed in Tagab when dozens of AGEs stormed several police posts but were repulsed by the army. Both sides suffered casualties ([352]). In February 2016, Afghan Special Forces, backed by air support of the Afghan Air Force, held a clearing operation in Tagab. According to residents, some houses were damaged ([353]).

([340]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([341]) Khaama Press, Police prevent terrorist attack in Kapisa, 13 January 2016.

([342]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Blast hits Kapisa teachers training centre, 6 injured, 25 May 2016.

([343]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 notorious Taliban commanders eliminated, 14 September 2015.

([344]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 Taliban, 2 ANA troops killed in Tagab offensive, 3 October 2015.

([345]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 rebels dead, attack on Alasai district repulsed, 9 October 2015.

([346]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban torch 3 checkpoints in Kapisa's Tagab, 14 October 2015.

([347]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces retake some areas in Tagab, kill 9 rebels, 15 October 2015.

([348]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 worshippers wounded when rocket hits Tagab mosque, 17 October 2015.

([349]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban suffer losses, attack on Ala Sai beaten back, 19 October 2015.

([350]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 60 militants killed, 120 injured in Kapisa clashes, 23 October 2015.

([351]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban torch houses of ALP members in Kapisa, 16 December 2015.

([352]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Casualties as forces and rebels clash in Kapisa, 25 January 2016.

([353]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Commander among 4 insurgents killed in Kapisa operation, 15 February 2016.

In March 2016, security forces held a large clearing operation in Nejrab, called 'Khanjar 21'. Government sources claimed to have killed between 23 and 30 AGEs and injured 27 more during the 18-day operation. Local sources quoted by Pajhwok claimed the violence killed four civilians while 14 were injured. According to these sources, the violence displaced 1,500 families ([354]). Simultaneously, the Taliban launched an attack on several ALP positions in Tagab ([355]).

In April 2016, there were heavy clashes in Alasay ([356]) and Tagab, where AGEs again stormed an ANA security post ([357]).

In these contested districts, AGEs also regularly targeted government officials or civilians over allegations of spying for the government. These include an attack on a former advisor to president Karzai, targeted with explosions in Tagab district in September 2015. His son and brother were wounded in the attack ([358]). A doctor was killed by gunmen in Tagab in February 2016 ([359]). In February 2016, a MIED attached to a Ministry of Justice vehicle exploded and injured one boy and four men ([360]). In April 2016, local residents of the Nejrab district claimed that the Taliban had executed 25 civilians in the past five years over charges of spying for the government. Apparently, they mainly target village elders for supporting the government ([361]). Also in April 2016, a Taliban member accused of spying for the government was executed in Tagab district ([362]). In August 2016, Pajhwok reported the targeted killing of a religious leader in Hisa-e-Awal-e-Kohestan ([363]).

As of June 2016, according to the Institute for Study of War, much of Tagab is under Taliban control, while big parts of Alasay and Nejrab are 'high confidence Taliban support zones'. 'Low confidence support zones' connect these areas with Parwan and Baghlan ([364]).

In a clash between two villages over a long-running feud, one person died and four others were wounded in Hisa-e Duwum-e Kohestan district in April 2016 ([365]). The clash continued in May 2016, when a six-year-old girl was killed and six others, including a women, were wounded ([366]).

Displacement

The violent clashes, which lasted for weeks in Tagab and Alasay districts in October 2015 led to hundreds of families being displaced from their homes. The crossfire of ground engagements of both sides, and Taliban warnings to the population ahead of their offensives, led many in these districts to flee to Kabul, Jalalabad and other districts in Kapisa ([367]). In September and November 2015, UNHCR mentioned displacement from Kapisa to Kabul ([368]).

From January to April 2016, UNHCR profiled 5,100 IDPs from Kapisa, mainly from Tagab and Alasay. Parts of this population movement went to Kabul ([369]).

([354]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kapisa offensive leaves 3 dead, 7 wounded, 10 March 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Militant commander, woman dead in Kapisa operation, 12 March 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 24 Taliban militants killed in Kapisa & Ghazni clashes, 23 March 2016; Tolo News, 23 insurgents killed in Kapisa operation, 29 March 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 23 militants killed, 27 injured in Kapisa offensive, 30 March 2016; Khaama Press, Taliban suffer heavy casualties in Kapisa military operation, 31 March 2016.

([355]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban commander eliminated in Kapisa, 11 March 2016.

([356]) Tolo News, Heavy fighting underway in over 10 provinces, 16 April 2016.

([357]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 insurgents eliminated in Kapisa & Logar provinces, 28 April 2016.

([358]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kapisa blast injures family members ex-advisor, 23 September 2015.

([359]) Tolo News, Unknown gunmen kill Kapisa doctor, 15 February 2016.

([360]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016, July 2016, p. 46.

([361]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Insurgents execute 25 on spying charges in Kapisa, 6 April 2016.

([362]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Militants execute man on spy charge in Tagab, 22 April 2016.

([363]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Prayer leader gunned down, worshipper injured in Kapisa, 8 August 2016.

([364]) ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of April 12, 2016, 12 April 2016; ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of June 30, 2016, 14 July 2016.

([365]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 dead, 4 wounded as Kapisa villagers clash, 30 April 2016.

([366]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians among 6 dead, 13 wounded in Kandahar & Kapisa, 10 May 2016.

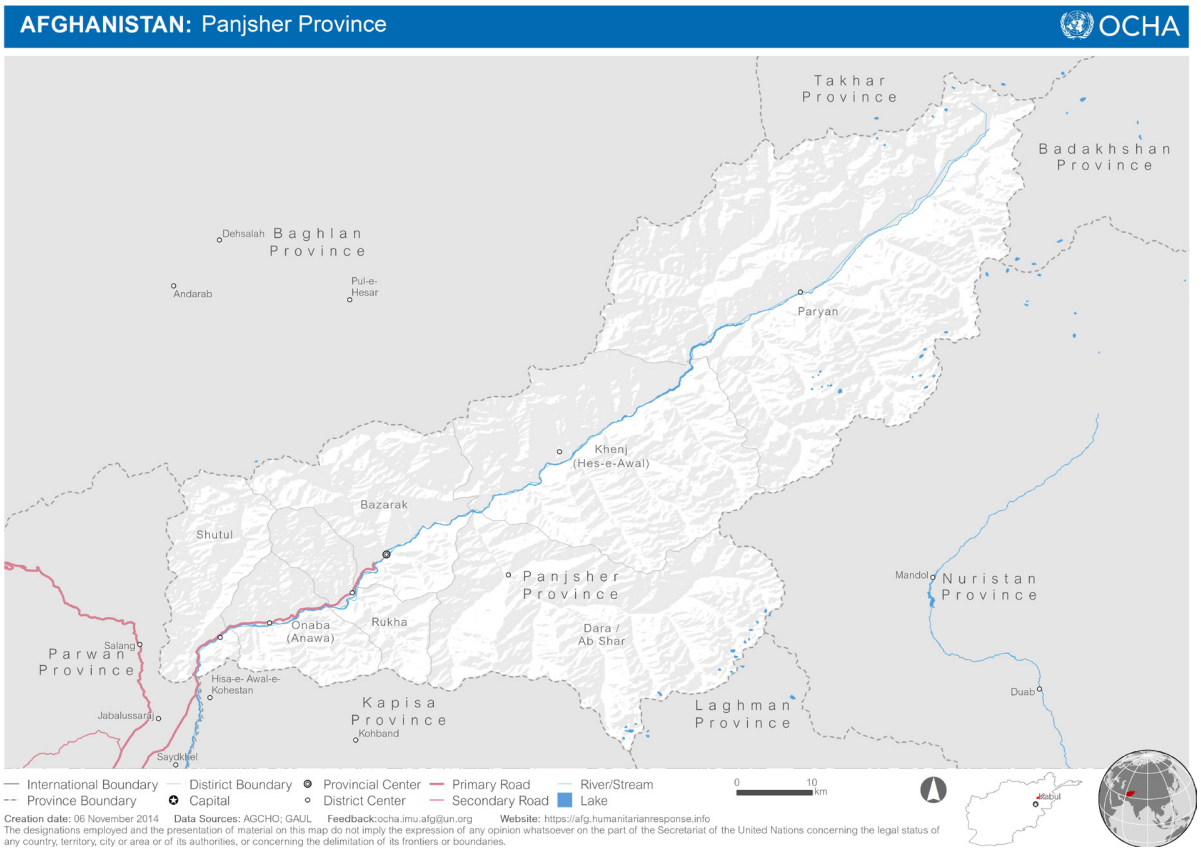
([367]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Recent clashes displace hundreds of families in Kapisa, 21 October 2015; UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement in 2015: the Year in Review, 28 April 2016, p. 9.

([368]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, September 2015; UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, November 2015.

([369]) UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Conflict Induced Displacements - Snapshot (1 January - 31 April 2016) [map], 16 May 2016.

2.1.4. Panjshir

General description of the province



Panjshir Province is located in the central zone of Afghanistan and surrounded by Nuristan in the east, Kapisa in the south, Parwan in the west, Baghlan in the northwest, Takhar to the north and Badakhshan in the northeast. Nearly the entire province is mountainous or semimountainous terrain while only about 4.4 % of the area is made up of flat land ([370]). Panjshir was part of Parwan prior to 2004 ([371]). The province has an estimated 153,487 inhabitants ([372]).

Panjshir Province consists of the following districts: Bazarak, Dara/ Ab Shar, Khenj (HeseAwal), Onaba (Anawa), Paryan, Rukha, Shutul ([373]). The capital is Bazarak. 98 % of its inhabitants are believed to be Tajiks while some Sunni Hazaras live in Dara and Paryan districts. A very small population of Kuchi is also reported ([374]).

In February 2015, avalanches killed at least 186 people in Panjshir Province ([375]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Panjshir

Panjshir is a largely ethnically homogenous province, and its terrain and historical role against the Taliban has rendered insurgent infiltration difficult ([376]). Because of their central role in the events after September 11th, 2001, Panjshiris, as the ethnic Tajiks of the valley are known, went on to dominate the initial post-Taliban order in both politics and security forces ([377]).

([370]) MRRD, Panjshir Provincial Profile, n.d.

([371]) ISW, Panjshir Province. Regional Command East, n.d.

([372]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([373]) Humanitarian Response, AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012.

([374]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons; MRRD, Panjshir Provincial Profile, n.d.

([375]) AP, Afghan Avalanche Death Toll rises amid Rescue Efforts, 28 February 2015.

([376]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([377]) NY Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014.

Panjshir is historically linked to the Jamiat-e Islami and its armed wing Shurae Nazar. These links date back to both the Jihad during Soviet presence and the Taliban in 1996-2001. The political space in Panjshir is therefore dominated by the Jamiate Islami party and former Shurae Nazar networks. Shurae Nazar was founded by the late Ahmad Shah Massoud. According to a source in Kabul, Hezb-e Islami previously had followers in the valley but under Massoud's leadership Hezb-e Islami followers were persecuted, leaving Jamiat uncontested dominance in the province ever since ([378]). Massoud is buried in the province and his shrine regularly attracts high-placed people from Kabul ([379]).

A deep and narrow gorge at the valley's mouth keeps the province very isolated and makes it very difficult to access ([380]). Because of its geographical isolation and ethnic homogeneity, AGEs have not maintained a hold in this province. Nevertheless, authorities are concerned about insurgent intrusion through IDP movements, mainly coming from Nuristan ([381]).

The latest major security incidents in the province were attacks against the provincial governor's office in May 2013 and against the district administrative centre of Dara and the wellguarded gate to the province in May 2014 ([382]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Panjshir Province counted only 1 security incident ([383]): In April 2016, an IED exploded at night outside the compound of a senior government official in the capital Bazarak. There were no casualties reported ([384]).

Displacement

No displacement has been registered from Panjshir in the period September 2015 to April 2016 ([385]). In October 2015, 80 families who fled violence in the north of the country were said to live in dire conditions in the province ([386]).

([378]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([379]) Pajhwok Afghan News, President and CEO arrive in Panjshir province, 1 January 2016.

([380]) NY Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014.

([381]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([382]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([383]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

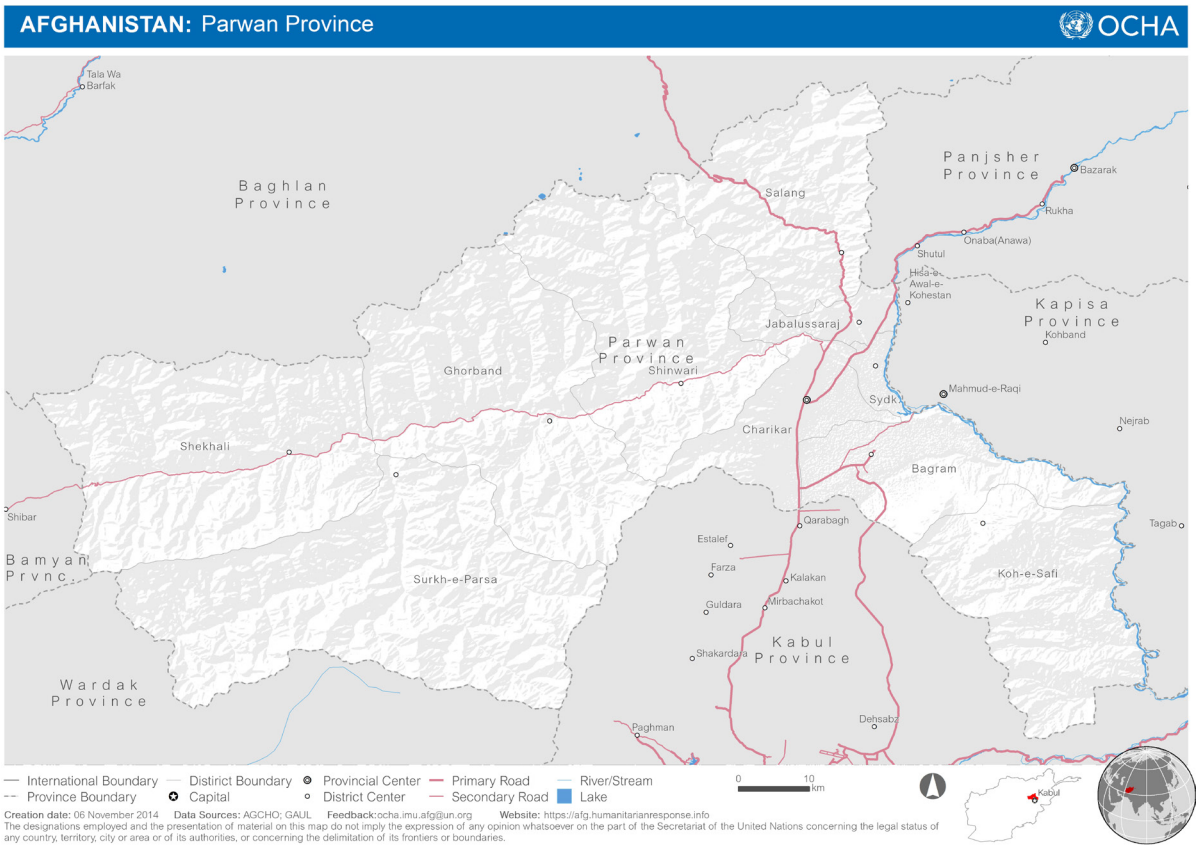
([384]) Western security official, anonymous source specialised in security in Afghanistan, email, 20 June 2016.

([385]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement in 2015: the Year in Review, 28 April 2016; UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Conflict Induced Displacements - Snapshot (1 January - 31 April 2016), 16 May 2016.

([386]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 80 families displaced to Panjshir live in dire conditions, 4 October 2015.

2.1.5. Parwan

General description of the province



Parwan Province is located north of Kabul and surrounded by Bamyan, Baghlan, Kapisa, Kabul and Wardak provinces. More than twothirds of the province is mountainous or semimountainous terrain while about one quarter of the area is flat land ([387]). Parwan Province is made up of the following districts: Bagram, Charikar, Ghorband (or Siagherd), Jabalussaraj, Kohe Safi, Salang, Sheikhali, Shinwari, Surkhe Parsa and Saydkhel ([388]). Parwan is estimated to have 664,502 inhabitants; its capital Charikar houses an estimated 57,746 ([389]).

Dari and Pashtu are the main languages spoken in the province; however Dari speakers outnumber Pashtu speakers by a ratio of 5 to 2 ([390]). According to an anonymous source in Kabul, 70 % of Parwan's inhabitants are Tadjik, 18 % Pashtun, 11 % Hazara and 1 % Turkmen ([391]).

Ethnic Tajiks have a presence in every district in Parwan and are the majority in Salang. Shinwari has a Pashtun majority and Ghorband a significant Pashtun population ([392]). Parwan Province also has a population of Kuchis or nomads whose numbers vary in different seasons ([393]). According to a source in Kabul, Tajiks live predominantly in Charikar, Salang, Jabalussaraj, Saydkhel, Bagram, Surkh-e Parsa and some parts of Sheikhali districts while Pashtuns predominantly live in the more restive districts of Shinwari, Koh-e Safi and parts of Ghorband. Hazaras and the small Turk minority reside in Shekhali and Surkh-e Parsa districts ([394]).

([387]) MRRD, Parwan Provincial Profile, n.d.

([388]) Humanitarian Response, AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012.

([389]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([390]) MRRD, Parwan Provincial Profile, n.d.

([391]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([392]) Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A valley once friendly, 19 July 2011.

([393]) MRRD, Parwan Provincial Profile, n.d.

([394]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

Background on the conflict and actors in Parwan

Surkh-e Parsa is also inhabited by Sunni Hazara, who are, according to analyst Thomas Ruttig, traditionally at odds with the Shia Hazara in Bamyan and therefore supportive of Hezb-e Islami ([395]).

Through the province runs Highway 1 connecting Kabul with Pule Khumri and other northern provincial capitals. From the Charikar, the principal access road to Bamyan, the Ghandak Highway runs over the Shibar pass and through the Ghorband valley ([396]). In Bagram lies an important military airfield which once was the largest American military base in the country where at its peak 40,000 military personnel and civilian contractors lived. The base also houses an infamous detention centre, previously run by the US but handed over to the Afghan government by the end of 2014 ([397]). The base still houses the bulk of the remaining 9,800 US troops in Afghanistan ([398]).

In recent years, the security situation in Parwan deteriorated steadily due to insurgent activity and clashes between AGEs and ANSF, but equally through the presence of illegal armed groups, often thought to be linked with local powerbrokers, and criminality. Widespread firearms possession, poverty and unemployment contribute to these developments ([399]). In the large Ghorband valley, which stretches over the districts Shinwar, Ghorband and Shekhali, security has deteriorated since 2009. The ANSF responded with various clearing operations in restive areas ([400]).

Reportedly, in 2015 there were 150 ALP in Ghorband (Siagherd), 116 with 50 'volunteers' in Shinwari and 134 in Koh-e Safi districts, although it was difficult to determine the exact presence on the ground as ALP are regularly targeted by AGEs ([401]). According to a local official, quoted by Pajhwok, in July 2015 the province had about 1,000 policemen. He said the province needed 3,000 more to maintain law and order ([402]). Besides ANSF, IMF remained active in the province in and around the military airbase in Bagram and in the Ghorband valley mainly through airpower and the use of UAVs or drones. The raid on a local powerbroker's compound in Charikar in June 2015, with international ground troops and air support, was an anomaly in this respect ([403]).

In 2014, Landinfo noted that the insurgent groups active in the province included the Taliban, Hezb-e Islami, IMU and Al Qaeda ([404]). Thomas Ruttig reported in 2011 that Pashtuns in Ghorband have traditionally been pro-Hezb-e Islami but the Taliban has been able to absorb some of its structures during their regime. Local Taliban networks have been reactivated and a provincial shadow administration has been set up ([405]).

A source in Kabul stated ([406]):

> 'The Taliban in the province are constituted primarily by locals. In the mountainous Ghorband valley, Shinwari is a predominantly Pashtun district while Sia Gird [Ghorband] is a mixture of Pashtun and Tajiks. Koh-e-Safi district is located on the eastern part of the province with a Pashtun population (Safi). The presence of insurgents can be attributed to numerous factors: one is the perception of marginalisation by the communities from the provincial government dominated by Jamiat-affiliated Tajiks which has contributed to the alliance of former HIG [Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin] commanders with Taliban; another is unresolved grievances and political divisions of past decades nurtured by key powerbrokers to further their political goals. An additional element, is the rural poverty of mountain valleys with deeply traditional and isolated communities sympathetic to religious fundamentalism, among other reasons'

([395]) Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A valley once friendly, 19 July 2011.

([396]) Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan Sikkerhetsoppdatering, 9 January 2014, p. 19.

([397]) Time, Inside Afghanistan's Bagram Airfield, 27 February 2015.

([398]) Daily Beast (The), Worst attack in 18 months shocks U.S. military, 21 December 2015.

([399]) EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan. Security Situation, January 2016, pp. 49-50.

([400]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([401]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([402]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Insecurity growing in Parwan say dwellers, 20 July 2015.

([403]) Tolo News, Attack on former jihadi leaders house sparks protest in Parwan, 29 June 2015.

([404]) Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan Sikkerhetsoppdatering, 9 January 2014, p. 20.

([405]) Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A valley once friendly, 19 July 2011.

([406]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

In September 2015, an international organisation active in the province reported on IS infiltration and a few activities in parts of Parwan such as Shinwari, Ghorband and Koh-e Safi districts coming from the neighbouring Baghlan Province to Ghorband and Shinwari districts. But they reportedly have met resistance from some local AGEs ([407]). It is estimated that some 300 AGEs are active in the Ghorband valley ([408]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Parwan Province counted 140 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([409]):

Violence targeting individuals	10
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	72
Explosions	25
Security enforcement	25
Non-conflict related incidents	5
Other incidents	3
Total security incidents	**140**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Parwan Province ([410]):

Ghorband (Siagherd)	43	Saydkhel	4
Bagram	38	Salang	4
Shinwari	20	Surkh-e Parsa	3
Charikar	16	Shekhali	2
Koh-e Safi	8	Jabalussaraj	2

In September 2015, unknown gunmen attacked a wedding party, killing two people and injuring five. It was suggested that the perpetrators were an illegal armed group ([411]). A group of illegal armed men together with local residents blocked the highway to Bamyan in Ghorband district in November 2015 in protest of the assignment of a new district police chief ([412]).

In December 2015, the director of the Women's Affairs Department in Parwan declared a sharp increase in violence against women in the province ([413]).

In Shinwari district in January 2016, in the Ghorband valley, the Taliban seized seven men from their cars while they were travelling to a wedding party and shot them in the hands or legs. According to the district governor, the incident took place in a remote area under Taliban control. Supposedly, the Taliban had targeted them because they refused to take up arms against the government ([414]). In February 2016, in Ghorband district, a suicide attacker targeting Afghan security forces detonated an improvised explosive device near the entrance of the district health clinic, according to UNAMA, killing seven civilians and injuring seven others, including three boys ([415]). According to the district police chief, who was quoted by Pajhwok Afghan News, nine civilians and four Afghan Local Police (ALP) personnel were killed in this blast and the injured included 17 civilians and one ALP personnel ([416]). In another deadly suicide attack in April 2016, eight civilians were killed and more than 30 others wounded by an insurgent riding an

([407]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([408]) Tolo News, Suicide bomber kills 8 and wounds 34 in Parwan, 5 April 2016.

([409]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([410]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([411]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Attack on Parwan wedding party claims 2 lives, 16 September 2015.

([412]) Khaama Press, Illegal armed men block Kabul-Bamyan highway in Parwan, 2 November 2015.

([413]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Sharp rise in violence against women in Parwan, 2 December 2015.

([414]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban shoot and injured 7 civilians in Parwan, 26 January 2016.

([415]) UNAMA, UN calls on all parties to respect health facilities, 23 February 2016.

([416]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 killed, 18 injured in Parwan suicide blast, 22 February 2016.

explosives-laden motorcycle. Intending to target the district governor's building, he detonated his explosives before reaching the target in the bazaar in front of a school. Among the victims were several children and women ([417]). Later in April, the Taliban district shadow governor in Ghorband was killed in an ANSF operation ([418]).

In Bagram, the main target remains the big international military basis and its personnel. In December 2015, a suicide bomber targeted a joint patrol of IMF and ANSF, killing six US soldiers and injuring three Afghan policemen or one Afghan policeman and two U.S. soldiers, depending on the source ([419]). In May 2016, US patrols came under attack twice ([420]) and the base was targeted with rockets causing the injury of two civilians at the base ([421]). In August 2016, an SVBIED targeted a NATO convoy in Bagram injuring at least three ANP escorting the convoy. The Taliban claimed 12 American soldiers and five ANP were killed ([422]).

In January 2016, in two separate incidents, rockets were fired at a bank in Charikar. While the buildings suffered material damage, no casualties were reported in both incidents ([423]).

The stretch of the road running through Ghorband is declared a 'Taliban control zone' and a 'low confidence ISIS support zone' connects this area with Baghlan and Kapisa, according to ISW as of June 2016 ([424]). 'Taliban control- and support-zones' from neighbouring Tagab in Kapisa are also stretching out into Koh-e Safi district ([425]).

Displacement

UNHCR stated in October 2015: 'As one of the relatively stable provinces in the Central region, in early October also Parwan Province received IDPs from Kunduz city'. In October 2015, 223 families or 1,556 individuals were assessed as genuine conflict IDPs ([426]).

In an overview of 2015, Parwan is only mentioned as one of the neighbouring provinces of Kabul, from which conflict-induced IDPs came at a 'steady pace' ([427]).

UNHCR does not mention any displacement in or from Parwan Province in the first four months of 2016 ([428]).

([417]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Least 7 dead, 25 wounded in Parwan suicide attack, 5 April 2016; Khaama Press, Casualties feared as suicide blast rocks Parwan province, 5 April 2016; Tolo News, Suicide bomber kills 8 and wounds 34 in Parwan, 6 April 2016.

([418]) Khaama Press, Top Taliban leader killed in a special military operation in north of Afghanistan, 24 April 2016.

([419]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 American soldiers killed in Bagram suicide bombing, 21 December 2015; Daily Beast (The), Worst attack in 18 months shocks U.S. military, 21 December 2015.

([420]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign troops come under bomb attack in Bagram, 3 May 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, No casualties as IED hits NATO convoy in Parwan, 21 May 2016.

([421]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 wounded in rocket strike on Bagram airfield, police chief, 6 May 2016.

([422]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 police injured in car bomb attack, 22 August 2016.

([423]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Rocket hits microfinance bank in Charikar, no casualties, 16 January 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Rocket hits Finca bank building in Parwan, 25 January 2016.

([424]) ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of June 30, 2016, 14 July 2016.

([425]) ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of June 30, 2016, 14 July 2016.

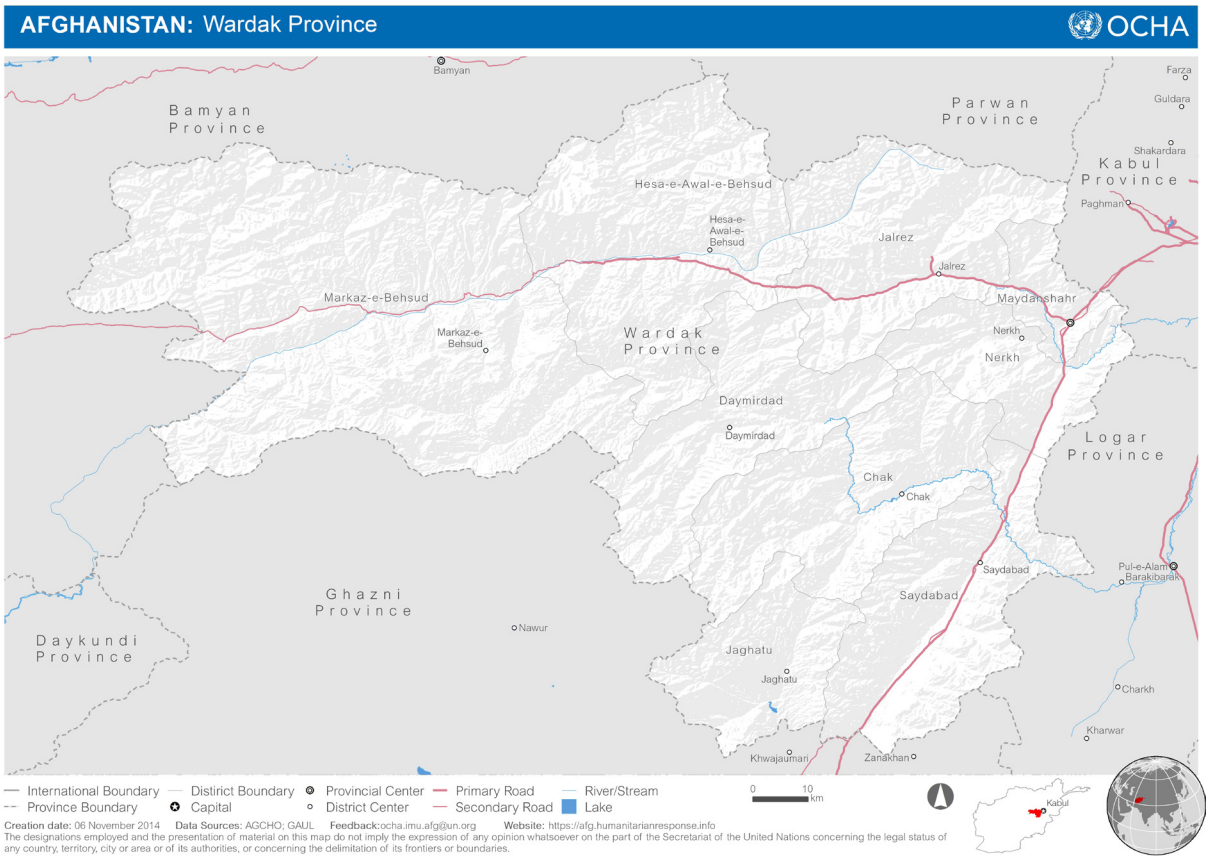
([426]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, October 2015.

([427]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement in 2015: the Year in Review, 28 April 2016, p. 9.

([428]) UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Conflict Induced Displacements - Snapshot (1 January - 31 April 2016), 16 May 2016.

2.1.6. Wardak

General description of the province



Wardak Province, also known as Maydan Wardak, shares borders with Parwan and Bamiyan to the north, Kabul and Logar in the east, and Ghazni to the south and west. More than fourfifths of the province is mountainous or semimountainous terrain while a little more than onetenth of the area is made up of flat land. The province of Wardak is divided into nine districts: Chak, Daymirdad, Hesae Awale Behsud, Jaghatu, Jalrez, Markaze Behsud, Maydan Shahr, Nirkh, Sayadabad ([429]). The capital is the town of Maydan Shahr, which is located almost 35 kilometres west of Kabul City ([430]). The main KabulKandahar highway intersects the province through the districts of Maydan Shahr, Nirkh and Sayadabad. A provincial road runs west from Maydan Shahr to Bamiyan through Jalrez and the districts of Hisae Awal-e Behsud and Markaz-e Behsud ([431]). The areas around the Kabul-Kandahar highway are more densely populated ([432]).

The province is estimated to house 596,287 residents ([433]). The major ethnic group living in Wardak Province is Pashtun, followed by Tajiks and Hazaras. The local Pashtun population belongs to a variety of Ghilzai tribes, primarily the Wardak, Kharoti and Hotak tribes ([434]). During spring, Kuchi migrations regularly cause violent clashes in the predominantly Hazara Behsud districts ([435]).

Despite its political and strategical importance due to its proximity to Kabul and status as gateway to the south, the province has few resources and attracts comparatively little financial and political support. It has an unexplored mining sector which holds modest economic potential. The bulk of the agricultural production in the province comes from the predominantly Hazara district Markaz-e Behsud ([436]).

([429]) Humanitarian Response, AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012.

([430]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Back Ground Profile of Maidan Wardak, n.d.

([431]) UNOCHA, Wardak Province District Atlas, 14 April 2014.

([432]) Goodhand, J. and Hakimi, A., Counterinsurgency, local militias and statebuilding in Afghanistan, January 2014, p. 17.

([433]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([434]) AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, February 2016, p. 33.

([435]) Landinfo, The conflict between Hazaras and Kuchis in the Beshud Districts of Wardak Province, 6 June 2011.

([436]) Goodhand, J. and Hakimi, A., Counterinsurgency, local militias and statebuilding in Afghanistan, January 2014, pp. 17-18.

Background on the conflict and actors in Wardak

In 2014, according to Landinfo, rebels consisted of local and regional Taliban groups, Hezb-e Islami and international groups of fighters ([437]). The main jihadi party in the 1980s and 1990s was Hezb-e Islami and most Taliban fighters in Wardak are former Hezb-e Islami members ([438]). In June 2015, the US Department of Defense reported that Al Qaeda fighters, pushed out of their safe havens in Waziristan by a Pakistani military operation, surfaced in Wardak, among other places, in the spring of 2015 ([439]). These reinforcements led to renewed fighting between Taliban and Hezb-e Islami fighters in Nirkh district in the summer ([440]).

According to a BBC report from October 2014 on Sayadabad's Tangi valley, this area is firmly under Taliban control. It collects taxes, runs the schools and maintains a rudimentary court system ([441]). Chak, also known as Chak-e Wardak, was considered the insurgent headquarters for the past 13 years. The Taliban had set up several checkposts in the district and ran a parallel judicial system until it was ousted by ANSF operations in January 2015 ([442]).

According to Landinfo, since 2008 the Taliban has significantly destabilised the province, resulting in several areas becoming inaccessible to government officials. As of autumn 2015, it was difficult for provincial government officials to travel from Maydan Shahr, the provincial capital, to any of the district centres ([443]). According to UNHCR, in September 2015 Wardak was in a state of permanent instability. The security situation in the summer of 2015 was tense with several security incidents, including IED attacks and explosions, targeting military forces and government institutions. Civilian property was destroyed, which was, according to UNHCR, a violation of the principle of distinction in International Humanitarian Law. Killing of civilians in confrontations between AGEs and ANSF was reported in several districts, such as Chak, Sayadabad and Nirkh ([444]).

In August 2015, the provincial governor labelled Daymirdad, Jaghatu, Nirkh, Chak and Jalrez as volatile districts of the province. He also stated 'although Behsud is a relatively calm district, there are disturbing questions about the rule of law there' ([445]). These Hazara districts were *de facto* under the control of the political party Hezb-e Wahdat. However, AREU stated that some Hazara areas in the province, without specifying which, were affected by Taliban presence ([446]).

The US Department of State also stated that the Taliban remained active throughout 2015 in what it called their 'traditional stronghold', Wardak ([447]). After Jalrez saw heavy fighting in the previous reporting period ([448]), the government created a pro-government militia outside the ALP, under the 'National Uprising Support Strategy' in 2015 ([449]).

The provincial governor said the security personnel in August 2015 in Wardak numbered 5,000, compared with up to 1,500 AGEs. He also regretted the province had no independent army battalion. The four ANA battalions in Wardak are operating under the Gardez-based brigade ([450]). Since October 2008, the province experienced a series of local security initiatives ([451]). The ALP, like earlier initiatives, was plagued by ethnic and political problems, inadequate vetting procedures and accountability. As a result, 258 ALP were dismissed in March 2012. According to the same source, there seems to be an improvement since but issues of corruption and criminality among the ALP still need a lot of effort to eradicate ([452]). In 2014, ALP staffing levels were reduced from 1,650 in seven districts to 975 in five

([437]) Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan Sikkerhetsoppdatering, 9 January 2014, p. 21.

([438]) AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, February 2016, pp. 37-38.

([439]) US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2015, p. 25.

([440]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Scores of dead, wounded in Hizb-e-Islami, Taliban clash, 17 June 2015.

([441]) BBC, Afghanistan conflict: Life Inside a Taliban Stronghold, 20 October 2014.

([442]) Tolo News, ANSF gain control of district Chak after 13 years, 28 January 2015.

([443]) AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, February 2016, p. 35.

([444]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, September 2015.

([445]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Effective security uplift plans drawn by Wardak governor, 8 August 2015.

([446]) AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, February 2016, p. 38.

([447]) US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2015, p. 1.

([448]) EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan. Security Situation, January 2016, pp. 53-54.

([449]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2015, February 2016, p. 65.

([450]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Effective security uplift plan drawn, Wardak governor, 8 August 2015.

([451]) HRW, "Just Don't Call It a Militia" Impunity, Militias, and the "Afghan Local Police", 12 September 2011; Goodhand, J. and Hakimi, A., Counterinsurgency, local militias and statebuilding in Afghanistan, January 2014, pp. 19-25.

([452]) International organisation, e-mail, 26 October 2014. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

districts, due to budgetary considerations, according to a source in Kabul ([453]). According to a US Department of Defense report from April 2014, ALP is active in the districts of Sayadabad, Chakh, Nirkh, Jalrez and Maydan Shahr ([454]). International Crisis Group reported about abusive behaviour by ALP and the total absence of complaints mechanisms and accountability, e.g. in Chakh district ([455]).

According to UNICEF and UNAMA, in 2015 there were three incidents at health facilities and between 10 and 15 conflict-related incidents against schools ([456]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Wardak Province counted 359 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([457]):

Violence targeting individuals	28
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	277
Explosions	33
Security enforcement	21
Non-conflict related incidents	0
Other incidents	0
Total security incidents	**359**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Wardak Province ([458]):

Jalrez	117	Maydan Shahr	26
Sayadabad	74	Jaghatu	18
Nirkh	51	Hisa-i Awali Bihsud	0
Chak	38	Markaz-e Bihsud	0
Daymirdad	34		

In October 2015, government officials claimed Taliban had wanted to (re)take the Chak district centre and several security posts but failed because of an ANSF ambush. ANSF claimed it killed a dozen AGEs and injured 18 more in the clash ([459]).

In Sayadabad civilians regularly became victims when caught in crossfire or ground engagements, often on, or around Highway 1. On 16 October 2015, during a clash between the Taliban and Afghan security forces in Sayedabad district, a Taliban-fired mortar hit the Kabul-Ghazni highway, killing two civilians and injuring nine others as they were travelling in buses ([460]). The clash involved heavy weapons on both sides and the highway remained closed for more than a day ([461]). In December 2015, ANA fired two explosive recoilless rifle rounds that hit a mosque in Sayedabad district, killing nine civilians, including four boys, and injuring three others ([462]). In February 2016, a child was shot by a soldier firing from his security post on the main Kabul-Ghazni road ([463]). In March 2016, a Ghazni judge was killed while passing with his vehicle over the same highway ([464]).

([453]) International organisation, e-mail, 26 October 2014. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([454]) US Department of Defense, Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, April 2014, p. 55.

([455]) ICG, The Future of the Afghan Local Police, 4 June 2015, p. 10.

([456]) UNAMA, Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key trends and incidents affecting children's access to healthcare and education in Afghanistan, April 2016 p. 2.

([457]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([458]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([459]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 rebels killed, 18 wounded in Wardak clashes, 8 October 2015.

([460]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2015, February 2016, p. 30.

([461]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Clashes Taliban block road near Maidan Shahr, 15 October 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Clashes erupt in Wardak, Kabul Ghazni highway closed, 16 October 2015.

([462]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2015, February 2016, p. 58.

([463]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan soldier accused of shooting a child detained, 20 February 2016.

([464]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghazni urban court judge shot dead in Maidan Wardak, 26 March 2016.

In February 2016, two separate ANSF operations in Nirkh resulted in firefights with the Taliban. According to government sources, two commanders and a Taliban fighter were killed in these operations ([465]). Government forces held a major clearing operation in the district a few days later, resulting in heavy fighting. The government claimed to have killed a dozen Taliban fighters in the operation that lasted for days ([466]). It claimed to have cleared several villages that were under Taliban control for many years ([467]).

On 18 February 2016, Afghan Special Forces and the IMF conducted a joint operation in the Tangi Sayedan area of Daymirdad district and entered a government health clinic funded by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan. Two patients and a 15-year-old boy on a visit were taken to a nearby shop and summarily executed ([468]). Later, IMF were accused of complicity in the raid ([469]).

In May 2016, the Ministry of Defense announced it had killed the first commander of Islamic State in Wardak in an airstrike ([470]).

In April 2016, during fighting as a result of an attack on an Afghan security forces convoy, crossfire injured six civilians in Sayedabad district ([471]).

In its mid-year report of 2016, UNAMA documented 12 abductions in Wardak Province in the first half of 2016 ([472]).

As of June 2016, according to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), most of Sayadabad, including the district centre, and parts of Chak, Nirkh and Jalrez are under control of the Taliban. The rest of Chak, Maydan Shahr and parts of Jalrez are considered 'high confidence Taliban support zones', while the rest of Nirkh and a small stretch in Hesae Awale Behsud are considered 'low confidence Taliban support zones' ([473]).

Also in August 2016, there were reports of several Taliban attacks in the province ([474]).

Displacement

A tense security situation and permanent instability continued to force people out of their homes. The majority of the conflict-induced IDPs in Wardak originate from different districts around Wardak and settle in the provincial capital Maidan Shahr ([475]). Kabul also continued to receive IDPs from Wardak, following large counter-insurgency operations in 2015 ([476]). In an overview of the first four months of 2016, UNHCR mentions only small displacement from three southern districts to Ghazni ([477]).

([465]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Taliban commanders eliminated in Wardak firefights, 7 February 2016.

([466]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Offensive against Taliban launched in Maidan Wardak, 10 February 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Dozen Taliban eliminated in Maidan Wardak operation, 14 February 2016.

([467]) Tolo News, 12 insurgents killed in Wardak operation, 14 February 2016.

([468]) UNAMA, UN calls all parties to respect health facilities, 23 February 2016.

([469]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign troops involved in Wardak clinic raid, SCA, 24 February 2016.

([470]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh commander among 4 rebels dead in airstrikes, 30 May 2016.

([471]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016, July 2016, p. 41.

([472]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016, July 2016, p. 66.

([473]) ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of April 12, 2016, 12 April 2016; ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of February 23, 2016, 23 February 2016; ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of June 30, 2016, 14 July 2016.

([474]) Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 21 killed, 13 vehicles destroyed in Wardak, 21 August 2016; Bakhtar News, Armed Insurgents Sustained Heavy Casualties In Maidan-Wardak, 21 August 2016.

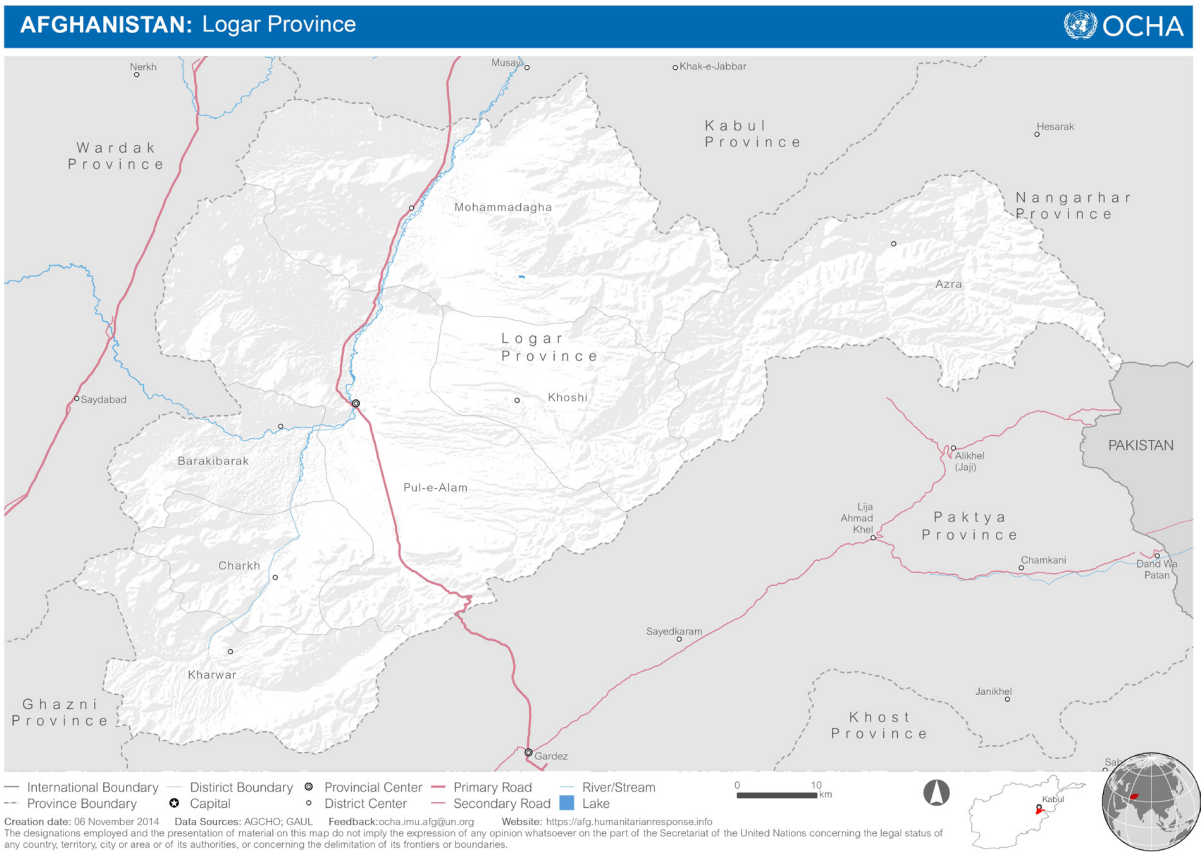
([475]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, September 2015.

([476]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement in 2015: the Year in Review, 28 April 2016, p. 9.

([477]) UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Conflict Induced Displacements - Snapshot (1 January - 31 April 2016) [map], 16 May 2016.

2.1.7. Logar

General description of the province



Logar Province is located to the south of Kabul and is surrounded by Nangarhar, Paktya, Kabul, Wardak and Ghazni provinces. The province is divided into seven districts: Azra, Baraki Barak, Charkh, Kharwar, Khoshi, Mohammad Agha, Pule Alam ([478]). The provincial capital is Pule Alam. The road connecting Kabul with Gardez in Paktya runs through this province. The province is estimated to have 392,045 inhabitants ([479]).

According to a source in Kabul, the province is 70 % Pashtun and 30 % Tajik. Tajiks constitute 75 % of the population in Charkh district, 50 % in Khushi district, 40 % in Baraki Barak, and 20-25 % in Mohammad Agha and Pul-e Alam districts. Kharwar and Azra districts are homogenous Pashtun districts ([480]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Logar

According to an anonymous source in Kabul, the province was said to be one of the most volatile and kinetic provinces in the region and constitutes an 'insurgents' highway' from Pakistan to Kabul, through an unguarded border of eight kilometres in Azra district ([481]).

According to local officials, quoted by AAN's Obaid Ali ([482]):

> 'the Taleban aim to rule the districts of Azra, Khoshi, Baraki Barak and Muhammad Agha. These areas border neighbouring provinces with high insurgent activity; controlling them opens up easy supply and back-up routes. For example, the Taleban in Azra district call in support from the Taleban front in Hesarak district of Nangarhar province; the Taleban in Baraki Barak enjoy support from their 'brothers' in Sayedabad district of Maidan-Wardak province. Another goal of the insurgents could be to connect their Logar fronts with the insurgents in Northern

([478]) Humanitarian Response, AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012.

([479]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([480]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([481]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([482]) Ali O., The empty streets of Mohammad Agha. Logar's struggle against the Taleban, 15 December 2014.

Waziristan, Pakistan. According to local journalists, the Taleban's networks in Logar, Ghazni, Maidan Wardak and Paktia gain direct support from Tehrik-e-Taleban Pakistan in Waziristan. The best route for connecting these groups leads through the districts of Azra and Muhammad Agha, which border Pakistan'.

In December 2014, Ali described the districts Mohammad Agha, Azra, Kharwar, Baraki Barak and Charkh as worst hit by the insurgency: 'The situation in Logar – never completely calm – started to deteriorate in 2011. Assassinations and kidnappings became daily news, in addition to increasing numbers of victims being caught up in the fighting between Afghan National Security Forces and insurgents' ([483]).

Relations between the local administration and communities have suffered from ANSF operations, particularly night raids, while security problems also limited government accessibility ([484]). In 2013 Taliban control of the province was so complete that even public servants turned to the Taliban courts, believing they were swifter and more honest than state judiciary ([485]). Local officials admitted in 2014 that 'most parts of Charkh, Kharwar and Azra are under the control of armed opponents' ([486]). In Mohammad Agha, the Taliban regularly pins documents to mosque walls that detail their rules and edicts, mostly calling on people not to support the government. The AGEs also deliver night letters threatening people to stop working for government institutions or they will be killed. As a result of this, in some villages families fled their homes for Kabul. Local insurgents have also imposed a curfew on everyone in Mohammad Agha, except themselves ([487]).

According to a source in Kabul in 2015**,** Azra, Kharwar, Charkh and Baraki Barak districts have limited government accessibility due to security issues ([488]). The US Department of State also stated that the Taliban remained active throughout 2015 in what it called its 'traditional stronghold', Logar ([489]).

According to Ali, 'the district centre of Mohammad Agha […], only 23 kilometres beyond Kabul's city limits […] is a key strategic area for the Taleban – not only because of the proximity to the capital but also because from there, local fighters can join insurgent fronts in the neighbouring provinces of Nangrahar in the east; Paktia, Paktika and Khost in the south; and Wardak and Ghazni in the west'([490]).

In August 2015, more than 2,000 security forces took part in an operation called 'Iron Triangular' which was launched simultaneously from Azra district, Kabul's Surobi district and Nangarhar's Khogyani in order to remove insurgent safe havens in these districts and break up the 'insurgent highway', from Pakistan's Waziristan to Kabul ([491]).

According to AAN's Obaid Ali, Logar became a 'dangerous place to live for many residents. The number of violent incidents and assassinations of locals committed by Taliban has increased starkly. […] Perhaps the larger number of displaced and civilian casualties stems from the Taleban's change in tactics, turning to larger-scale operations, but it could also hail from the ANSF's takeover of ground engagements from ISAF'([492]). Maruf Stanekzai, the head of the Stanekzai tribe, one of the dominant tribes in Mohammad Agha, told AAN in December 2014, '[i]n the past few months many innocent people in Muhammad Agha were killed by insurgents. No one is safe anymore, even in health clinics or mosques' ([493]). This continued throughout 2015. UNAMA mentioned Logar along with Kunduz and Helmand as one of the provinces where civilian casualties from combined operations of IMF and ANSF rose in the second half of 2015, contrary to the national trend ([494]).

According to Ali, in 2014, '600 Afghan Local Police (ALP) and 1,200 Afghan National Police ensure the safety of Logar's districts. […] In some districts, like Kharwar and Azra, the ANP only manages to ensure security for the government offices in the district centres. Suicide attacks continue to diminish the number of ALP in districts' ([495]). According to

([483]) Ali O., The empty streets of Mohammad Agha. Logar's struggle against the Taleban, 15 December 2014.

([484]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([485]) IWPR, Taleban justice dominant in Logar province, 2 August 2013.

([486]) Tolo News, Logar districts on the edge of collapse, officials, 12 December 2014.

([487]) Ali O., The empty streets of Mohammad Agha. Logar's struggle against the Taleban, 15 December 2014.

([488]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([489]) US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2015, p. 1.

([490]) Ali O., The empty streets of Mohammad Agha. Logar's struggle against the Taleban, 15 December 2014.

([491]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban planned inroads in Kabul through Hesarak, 27 August 2015; US Department of Defense, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2015 p. 30.

([492]) Ali O., The empty streets of Mohammad Agha. Logar's struggle against the Taleban, 15 December 2014.

([493]) Ali O., The empty streets of Mohammad Agha. Logar's struggle against the Taleban, 15 December 2014.

([494]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2015, February 2016, p. 63.

([495]) Ali O., The empty streets of Mohammad Agha. Logar's struggle against the Taleban, 15 December 2014.

a source in Kabul, 'Afghan Local Police (ALP) *tashkeel* were allocated to Pul-e-Alam (200 men), Mohammad Agha (200 men), Baraki Barak (150 men) and Azra (300 men). In Pul-e-Alam and Baraki Barak, a majority of the ALP was recruited among the shia, Dari speaking minority, creating tensions with the sunni Pashtun majority' ([496]).

In some districts, such as Baraki Barak, Charkh and Pul-e Alam, locals staged public uprisings against the Taliban ([497]). According to a source in Kabul, the 'popular uprisings' in Pul-e Alam and Mohammad Agha – one of which has been since dismantled – have been controversial for the same reasons as the ALP *tashkeel*: shia-dominated militias in sunni Pastun communities ([498]).

A relatively well-known local Taliban commander, Saad Emarati, swore allegiance to the Islamic State in January 2015 but his group was pushed out of Logar by a Taliban operation in July ([499]) after Emarati was reportedly beheaded by Islamic State agents in June 2015 for returning to the Taliban ([500]). Mohammad Agha and Charkh districts, according to the ISW, still have small pockets of IS support zones. IS reportedly recruits local fighters in Kharwar and Taliban fighters in Azra ([501]).

In the north of the province, in the district Mohammad Agha, lies what Thomas Ruttig called 'potentially the world's second-largest open copper pit' – the Aynak copper mine. This project has been won by a consortium of Chinese state-own companies but due to a precarious security situation in the area, opposition by the Taliban, archeological finds on the site and – more recently – political doubts about the contract with the Chinese, this project has still not effectively taken off ([502]).

There are supposedly 50 health centres in the district but it is acknowledged that this is insufficient to meet public need, especially for women and in rural areas ([503]). In 2015, there were two attacks on health facilities, according to UNAMA ([504]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Logar Province counted 180 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([505]):

Violence targeting individuals	15
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	100
Explosions	32
Security enforcement	28
Non-conflict related incidents	3
Other incidents	2
Total security incidents	**180**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Logar Province ([506]):

Pul-e Alam	55	Chark	14
Barak-e Barak	42	Khoshi	12
Mohammad Agha	25	Azra	9
Kharwar	23		

([496]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([497]) EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan. Security Situation, January 2016, p. 62.

([498]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([499]) Ruttig, T., Afghan Taliban contain Islamic State's regional reach, 17 November 2015.

([500]) Roggio B., Islamic State's Khorasan province beheads former shura member who defected back to the Taliban, 17 June 2015.

([501]) ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of April 12, 2016, 12 April 2016; ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of February 23, 2016, 23 February 2016.

([502]) Ruttig, T., Copper and Peace: Afghanistan's China Dilemma, 11 July 2015.

([503]) IWPR, More Doctors Needed in Afghan Districts, 12 January 2016.

([504]) UNAMA, Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key trends and incidents affecting children's access to healthcare and education in Afghanistan, April 2016, p. 2.

([505]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([506]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

The provincial capital Pul-i Alam repeatedly experienced explosions in crowded areas in this reporting period. In September 2015, a suicide bomber exploded his car in the middle of the bazaar in Pul-i Alam before reaching his intended target, government buildings. Eight civilians were wounded in the incident ([507]). Another attack in front of a bazaar in September 2015 was an MIED attached to a petrol tanker. It destroyed two ANSF vehicles that were part of the convoy and five shops, without causing any casualties ([508]). The judicial department head and the appellate attorney were wounded and their driver killed after unknown gunmen opened fire on their vehicle in Pul-i Alam in November 2015 ([509]). In December 2015, a bomb attached to a bicycle targeted a row of policemen lining up in front of the Kabul Bank branch in Pul-i Alam, injuring a policeman and two civilians ([510]). Again in front of the Kabul Bank in Pul-i Alam, a bomb targeting a police vehicle exploded in February 2016. One civilian and two policemen were injured in the explosion ([511]). One week later, another explosion targeted the police in Pul-i Alam, killing one officer and wounding eight others ([512]). Also in February, a remote-controlled IED targeted the vehicle of judicial personnel in Pul-i Alam. One police officer was killed in the explosion while four judges and four civilians sustained wounds. Although the Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, the provincial governor blamed 'land-grabbers' ([513]). Earlier in November 2015, the provincial government clamped down on land-grabbing following a presidential decree. Eighteen people were arrested on suspicion of having illegally seized government land in the previous 15 years ([514]). In August 2016, residents of an area in the capital Pul-i Alam reported that the Taliban was forcibly collecting *ushr*, an Islamic tax, on their wheat harvest ([515]).

In Mohammad Agha, the area of Zargon Shahr, according to Pajhwok Afghan News, is 'infested with Taliban militants' ([516]). In September 2015, ANSF launched a clearing operation in the area, where it believed the suicide bomber of explosion in the bazar of Pul-e Alam came from. This operation caused, according to government officials, heavy losses to the Taliban. Four soldiers and four civilians died too ([517]). In March 2016, during another military operation in the same area, the commander of the 203 military corps who was in charge of the operation was killed. AGEs placed explosives to the gate of his ancestral home and detonated the device when he came out after a visit ([518]). During more clearing operations in April 2016, the provincial governor claimed that seven Chechen fighters, including three women, were killed ([519]). According to a source in Kabul, Logar's position on the 'insurgents highway' from Pakistan to Kabul results in a higherthanaverage ratio of foreign fighters.[520] AAN's Obaid Ali describes the presence of foreign fighters, Pakistani Taliban, and Arabs, as an 'aggravating factor'. 'This lack of local roots among the fighters coming and going likely contributes to the cruelty of attacks on civilians' ([521]).

Despite the formal end of a combat mission for US forces in Afghanistan ([522]), US military forces have been very active in Logar Province. In October 2015, US forces conducted a joint operation in Baraki Barak district against Haqqani operators, killing and injuring several of them ([523]). Later the same month, ANSF and US military launched a joint operation, including air support, in Kharwar district. The operation, which killed 20 Taliban according to government sources, and other operations in Azra, came after AGEs were suspected of trying to overrun the whole province, as

([507]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Suicide bombing leaves 8 injured in Pul-i Alam, 5 September 2015.

([508]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 shops, 2 police vehicles destroyed in Logar explosion, 19 September 2015.

([509]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 court officials wounded, their driver killed in Logar, 18 November 2015.

([510]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Policemen, civilian wounded in Pul-i Alam, 6 December 2015.

([511]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 policemen, civilian injured in Pul-i Alam bombing, 1 February 2015.

([512]) Al Jazeera, Afghan soldiers killed in blast near army camp, 8 February 2016.

([513]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Judges among 8 injured in Logar bomb attack, 7 February 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Land grabbers pose serious security threats in Logar, 8 February 2016.

([514]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 detained on land grab charges, 9 November 2016.

([515]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar residents say Taliban forcibly collecting Ushr, 16 August 2016.

([516]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Senior military official killed in Logar bomb attack, 27 March 2016.

([517]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Suicide bombing leaves 8 injured in Pul-i Alam, 5 September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, 70 rebels killed in Logar operation, 7 September 2015.

([518]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Senior military official killed in Logar bomb attack, 27 March 2016.

([519]) Khaama Press, 3 female Chechen militants among 10 killed in Logar operations, 16 April 2016.

([520]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([521]) Ali O., The empty streets of Mohammad Agha. Logar's struggle against the Taleban, 15 December 2014.

([522]) New York Times (The), U.S. Combat Missions May End, but Fighting Goes On, 14 May 2016.

([523]) Pajhwok Afghan News, US-Afghan raid leaves 6 Haqqanis dead in Logar, 8 Ocotober 2015.

they had done in Kunduz in September 2015 ([524]). The US presence in Logar comes at a cost: after a roadside bomb targeted one of their vehicles in Pul-e Alam in October 2015, US forces were accused of firing indiscriminately at civilians and dislodging some residents from their homes ([525]).

In a repetition of earlier incidents, two deminers were kidnapped in Mohammad Agha district in October 2015 ([526]). In February 2016, four tribal elders were kidnapped by unknown gunmen in Azra district. They were released two days later ([527]). The Taliban denied involvement in this incident and blamed pro-government militiamen for the kidnapping ([528]).

In October 2015, ANSF held a week-long clearing operation in Kharwar district. The government spokesman stated the district was previously under complete Taliban control but the operation, in which he claimed more than a hundred AGEs had been killed, would not stop before the whole district was cleared ([529]). In November 2015, several Taliban, including the district shadow governor of Khoshi, were arrested during night raids in Khoshi district ([530]). During more raids in April 2016, NDS claimed to have arrested another Taliban commander and killed three of his fighters ([531]). In another clearing operation in Baraki Barak district in January 2016, a civilian was killed in the crossfire when ANSF and Taliban clashed ([532]). During a night raid in Pul-e Alam in April 2016, another Taliban commander was arrested ([533]).

One child was killed and three other were wounded when a roadside bomb exploded in Charkh district in February 2016. Government officials stressed this road was not used by ANSF, only by locals who want to visit the nearby shrine ([534]). Shrines have been targeted by AGEs before ([535]).

In the previous reporting period, several incidents were mentioned in which schools, teachers, students or education officials were targeted, resulting in limited access to education ([536]). Such incidents continued to happen throughout this reporting period. In September 2015 two schoolchildren were killed and three others wounded when a roadside bomb exploded while they were going to school in Azra district ([537]). A teacher was shot in Pul-i Alam at the end of May 2016 ([538]).

According to reports by ISW in 2016, large parts of the southern districts Baraki Barak, Charkh and Kharwar are under Taliban control. Most of the rest of the province is considered 'high confidence Taliban support zone'. In February 2016, ISW considered the Charkh district centre contested by Taliban, but not anymore in April 2016 ([539]).

Displacement

In November 2015, UNHCR reported that 174 families had fled the violence, intimidation and harassment. Displacement occurred gradually from January 2015 to November 2015 and largely within the province. Most IDPs were displaced from Pul-e Alam, Baraki Barak, Khoshi, Kharwar, to the provincial centre and to relatively safe areas of Mohammad Agha and Pul-e Alam districts. 346 families from Logar were reported in Kabul ([540]). From January to April 2016, 2,100 IDPs were reported in Logar. Most of them moved around in the province or to Kabul ([541]).

([524]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan-US forces kill 20 insurgents in Logar, 20 October 2015.

([525]) Pajhwok Afghan News, US forces accused of killing 4 civilians in Logar, 12 October 2015.

([526]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Gunmen kidnap 2 de-miners in Logar, 11 October 2015.

([527]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar tribal elders freed; payment of ransom ruled out, 23 February 2016.

([528]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Tribal elders kidnapped in Azra, Taliban deny involvement, 21 February 2016.

([529]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 110 militants killed in Logar, Taliban refute, 15 October 2015.

([530]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's shadow district chief among 6 detained in Logar, 25 November 2015.

([531]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban military commander held in Logar raid, 3 April 2016; Khaama Press, Senior Taliban injured shortly after returning from Pakistan to Logar, 4 April 2016.

([532]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians among 3 dead in Logar clearing operation, 28 January 2016.

([533]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Notorious Taliban commander captured, weapons seized in Logar, 11 April 2016.

([534]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 child killed, 3 wounded by Taliban-planted bomb in Logar, 24 February 2016.

([535]) EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan. Security Situation, January 2016, pp. 61-62.

([536]) EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan. Security Situation, January 2016, p. 60.

([537]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 schoolchildren dead in Logar roadside bombing, 10 September 2015.

([538]) Pajhwok Afghan News, School teacher gunned down in Logar, 1 June 2016.

([539]) ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of April 12, 2016, 12 April 2016; ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of February 23, 2016, 23 February 2016; ISW, Afghanistan partial threat assessment as of June 30, 2016, 14 July 2016.

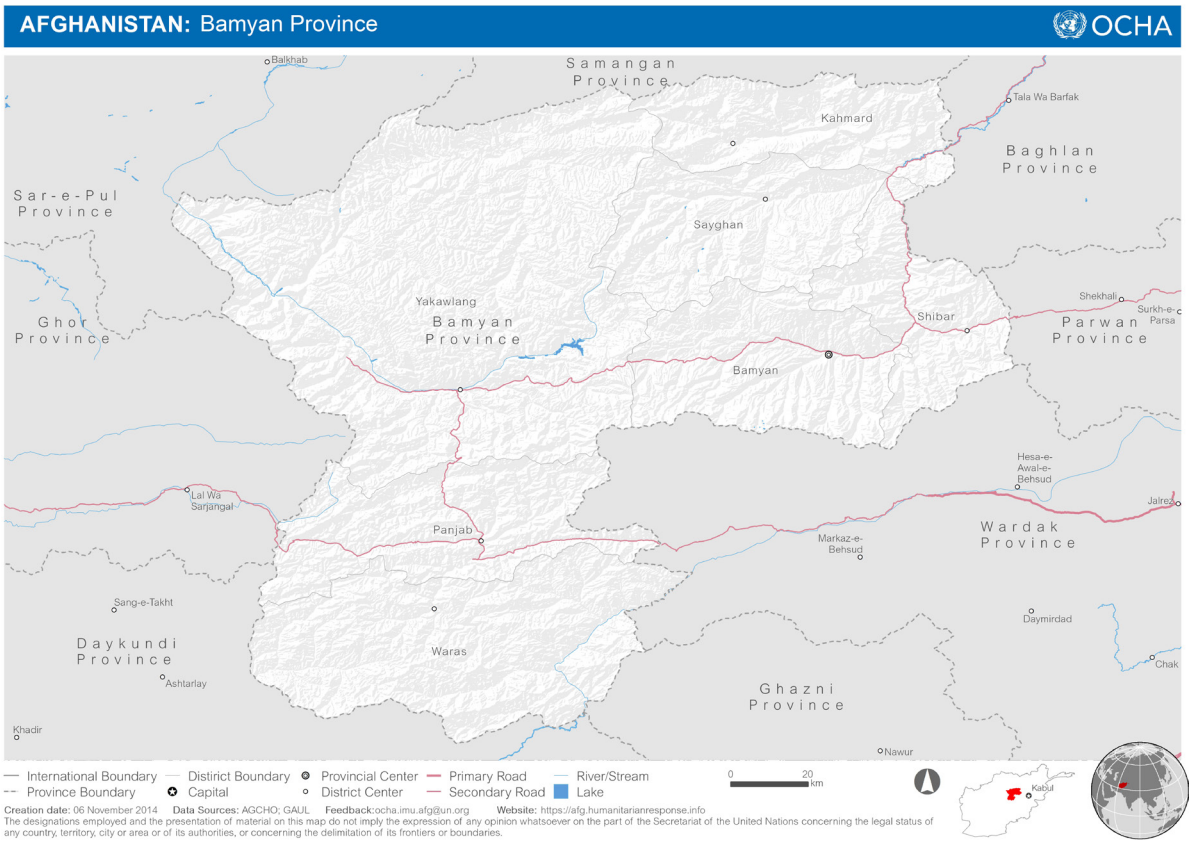
([540]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, November 2015.

([541]) UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Conflict Induced Displacements - Snapshot (1 January - 31 April 2016), 16 May 2016.

2.2. Central Highlands

2.2.1. Bamyan

General description of the province



Bamyan Province borders Samangan province to the north, Baghlan, Parwan and Wardak to the east, Ghazni and Daykundi to the south and Sar-e Pul and Ghor to the west. It is divided into 7 districts: Bamyan, Kahmard, Panjab, Sayghan, Shibar, Waras and Yakawlang ([542]). Bamyan City is the capital of the province ([543]). Bamyan Province is mountain-locked, people mainly live in the Bamyan valley in the east and in the Band-e-Amir valley in the west ([544]). The province has an estimated 447,218 inhabitants ([545]). The large majority of the population belongs to the Hazara ethnic group, followed by Tajiks, Tatars and Pashtuns ([546]). Dari is the dominant language ([547]), more than 96 % of the inhabitants speak it ([548]).

The Kabul-Bamyan highway is one of the two main routes connecting Bamyan with the capital via Wardak. The pass is 60 kilometres closer to Kabul than the route via Parwan Province ([549]). In March 2016 Kam Air began direct commercial flights between Kabul and Bamyan ([550]).

([542]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Bamyan Province - Reference Map, 18 February 2014.

([543]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Bamyan Province - Reference Map, 18 February 2014.

([544]) Bamyan Tourism, The Land, n.d.

([545]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([546]) MRRD, Report of the Survey on Agricultural and Rural Development Potential in the Central Highlands of Afghanistan, November 2010, p. 19.

([547]) Afghan Ag, Bamyan, n.d.

([548]) ISW, Regional Command East, n.d.

([549]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Hajigak Pass reopens for traffic, 26 April 2015.

([550]) Khaama Press, Kam Air starts direct commercial flights to Bamyan for the first time, 9 March 2016.

Background on the conflict and actors in Bamyan

The Taliban's establishment in the province is illustrated by its exploitation of the Kahmard mine in Bamyan since 2013. After the official closure of the mine, the Taliban extracted coal from it, which provided it with a stable source of income of reportedly more than 3,000 USD per day. The closure of mines in Bamyan in 2013 left approximately 4,000 young men unemployed and several of them have since joined the AGEs' ranks ([551]).

According to provincial officials, Taliban fighters have attempted to attack Bamyan from the neighbouring Baghlan ([552]). In recent years many incidents of violence have been reported in Shikari valley in Sayghan district ([553]).

In November 2015, the activity of very few Islamic State AGEs was reported in Bamyan ([554]).

The ALP programme is not present in Bamyan ([555]).

According to Khaama Press, Bamyan is 'a relatively peaceful province' ([556]). Local officials stated in February 2016 that Bamyan is a stable province ([557]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Bamyan Province counted 33 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([558]):

Violence targeting individuals	4
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	12
Explosions	1
Security enforcement	9
Non-conflict related incidents	4
Other incidents	3
Total security incidents	**33**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Bamyan Province ([559]):

Kahmard	12	Sayghan	4
Shibar	8	Yakawlang	2
Bamyan	7		

In February 2016, NDS officials seized arms from a Taliban cache in Shibar district. The arms were hidden by Mullah Seddiqullah, who is a Taliban commander in Tala Wa Barfak district of Baghlan ([560]). In April 2016, NDS officials discovered caches of weapons and explosives in Kahmard district near the border with Baghlan province ([561]).

In May 2016, Taliban fighters from Baghlan attacked police checkpoints in Shikari valley in Sayghan district of Bamyan but the Afghan security forces repelled the attack; they killed six Taliban fighters and injured 10 others. Three police officers were also killed and five others injured in the clashes ([562]).

There were several demonstrations in Bamyan Province. In September 2015, civil-society activists protested in the province against the killing of civilians in different parts of the country ([563]). In October and November 2015, teachers

([551]) Afghanistan Today, Taliban making thousands of dollars every day from 'closed' mines in Bamiyan and Wardak, 15 July 2015.

([552]) Afghanistan Times, Six militants killed in Bamyan, 21 May 2016.

([553]) Afghan Zariza, Community leaders in Bamyan and Baghlan join hands to tackle the issue of insecurity, 6 May 2015.

([554]) Oxford Analytica, Afghan Taliban contain Islamic State's regional reach, 17 November 2015.

([555]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 89.

([556]) Kahrami Shahid rence Map, 19yanf 2016 operation in Sabari district; haama Press, Kam Air starts direct commercial flights to Bamyan for the first time, 9 March 2016. ahrami Shahid rence Map, 19yanf 2016 operation in Sabari district;

([557]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Iranian-made' bombs discovered in Bamyan, 28 February 2016.

([558]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([559]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([560]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Iranian-made' bombs discovered in Bamyan, 28 February 2016; BAAG, Afghanistan in February 2016, n.d.

([561]) Pajhwok Afghan News, NDS operatives seize weapons catches in Bamyan, 10 April 2016.

([562]) Afghanistan Times, Six militants killed in Bamyan, 21 May 2016; Rasad News Agency, Three Policemen killed and Five Others Injured in Bamyan, 21 May 2016.

([563]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilian deaths blamed on govt's indifference, 10 September 2015.

protested because the government had not paid their salaries for several months ([564]). In November 2015, civil-society acitivists held a gathering and hundreds of peope staged protests in Bamyan condemning the beheading of Hazaras by the Islamic State in Zabul ([565]). In February 2016, hundreds of people demonstrated against the abduction of some Bamyan residents on their way to Kabul ([566]). On the Kabul-Bamyan route a number of kidnappings were reported in the first quarter of 2016 ([567]).

In February 2016, hundreds of people demonstrated against the road conditions in the province ([568]). Between January and May 2016, several demonstrations were staged in Bamyan against the change in the route of the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TUTAP) power project. A decision was made to route the project through the Salang Pass rather than Bamyan ([569]). The project – financed by the Asian Development Bank – seeks to boost access to electricity. A major feature of the project is linking together the 10 separate grids that provide electricity in Afghanistan ([570]).

Displacement

The Central Highlands saw the lowest levels of displacements in 2015 ([571]). In November 2015, small-scale displacements were profiled in Bamyan ([572]).

In February 2016, some families left their villages in the province and relocated to urban areas, including Bamyan City, because of water shortages and limited access to agricultural land in their areas of origin ([573]).

([564]) Pajhwok Afghan News, School teachers sit-in a protest in Bamyan, 7 October 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Teachers stage a protest in Bamyan, 2 November 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Bamyan teachers protest non-payment of salaries, 2 November 2015.

([565]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Bamyan activists seek justice for Daesh victims, 11 November 2015.

([566]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Protest, 7 February 2016; Khaama Press, Afghan MPs warn government for changing TUTAP route from Bamyan to Salang, 4 May 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, TUTAP project route change triggers angry protest in Bamyan, 6 May 2016.

([567]) Khaama Press, Kam Air starts direct commercial flights to Bamyan for the first time, 9 March 2016.

([568]) BAAG, Afghanistan in February 2016, n.d.

([569]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Protest, 7 May 2016.

([570]) ADB, Sector assessment (summary): Energy, n.d.

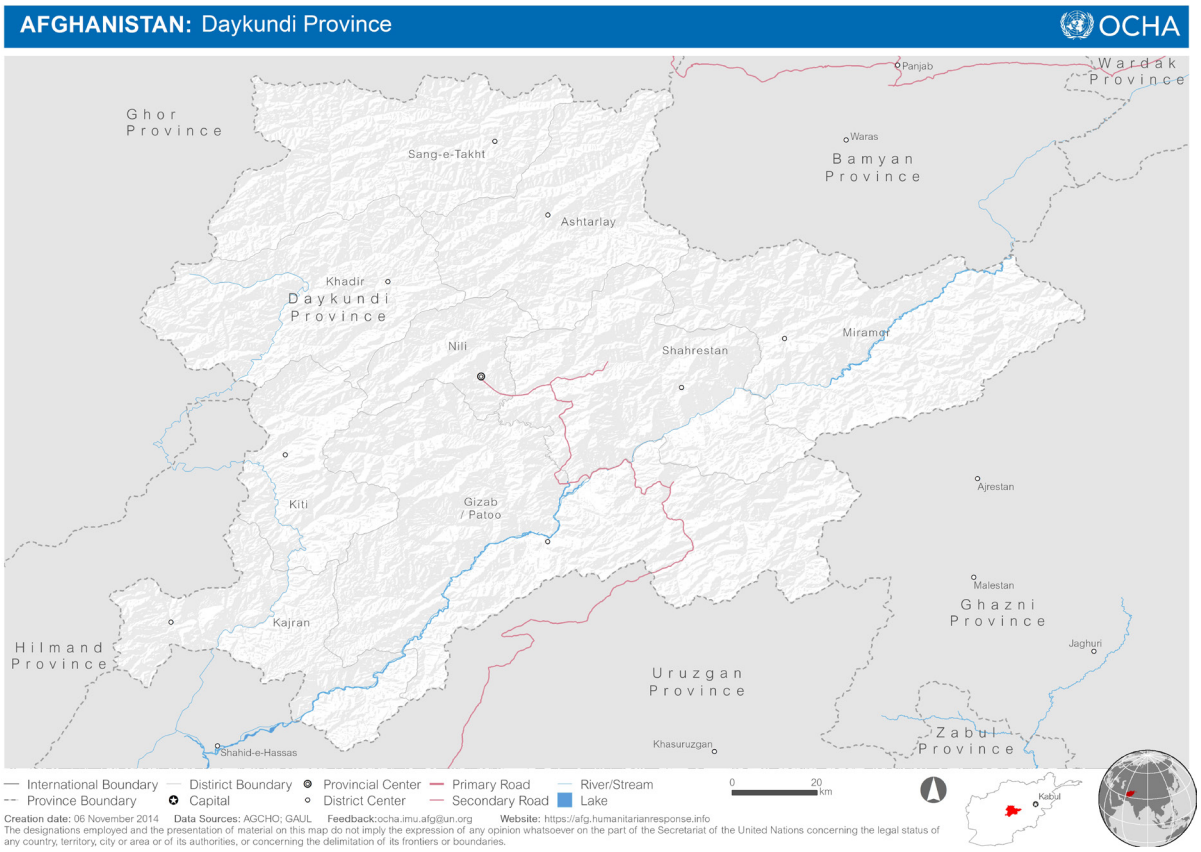
([571]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-induced Internal Displacement 2015: The Year In Review, April 2016, p. 2.

([572]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, November 2015, p. 2.

([573]) UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin, Afghanistan, 01-29 February 2016, 13 March 2016, p. 5.

2.2.2. Daikundi (Dai Kundi)

General description of the Province



Located in the Central Region, Daikundi is surrounded by Ghor Province in the north, Bamyan province in the east, Ghazni province in the south, Uruzgan province in the southwest and Helmand province in the west[574]. Besides the provincial capital Nili, Daikundi consists of the following districts: Ashtarlay, Kajran, Khadir, Kiti, Miramor, Sang-e-Takht, Shahrestan and Gizab/Patoo ([575]).

Regarding the establishment of the province of Daikundi, sources differ. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi was once a district of Uruzgan Province and was given the status of a separate province in 2003 ([576]). However, according to the Dutch embassy in Kabul, Daikundi originated from the province of Uruzgan in March of 2004. Additionally, it was stated that the exact borders of the districts and the province are not clear ([577]). Moreover, the district of Gizab is disputed ([578]). According to AAN, Gizab is formally still part of Daikundi Province, despite the fact that in 2006 it was temporarily placed under the authority of the province of Uruzgan, a decision that still stands, even though at that time there was no government presence there ([579]).

About 80 % of Daikundi is mountainous. Due to heavy snowfall in the long winter, roads remain blocked for months, cutting the communication of the province with rest of the country ([580]).

([574]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi province background profile, n.d.; Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Central Statistics Organization, Socio-demographic and Economic Survey – Daykundi, 2012, p. 15.

([575]) UNOCHA, Daykundi Province – Reference Map [map], 18 February 2014.

([576]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Mineral resources of Daikundi province, 1 February 2014.

([577]) Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul (The), Context Analysis/URUZGAN Province, August 2006, p. 3.

([578]) Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Central Statistics Organization, Daykundi province, Socio-demographic and Economic Survey, Highlights, 2014, p. 5.

([579]) Van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Gizab; the fight everyone chose to ignore, 31 October 2011.

([580]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi province background profile, n.d.; Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Central Statistics Organization, Socio-demographic and Economic Survey – Daykundi, 2012, p. 15.

The main crops in the province are wheat, barley, potatoes, almonds and beans. However, Daikundi is one of the least productive provinces agriculturally; most of the land is barren and inaccessible ([581]). According to UNODC, 381 hectares of opium poppy were cultivated in Daikundi in 2015, which represents a 35 % decrease from 2014 ([582]).

UN OCHA estimated the population for 2015 to be 424,339 in Daikundi ([583]). Hazaras form the majority in the province. Daikundi also has small populations of Pashtun, Balochi and Sayeed ([584]).

In June of 2015, the second female governor in Afghanistan, Masooma Muradi, was appointed to the province of Daikundi ([585]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Daikundi

Daikundi was regarded as a relatively safe area by Pajhwok Afghan News in March 2015 ([586]), although locals complained about the presence of illegal armed groups in the province, extortion, kidnapping of girls and armed robbery ([587]). According to a provincial council member, Khadir, Sang-e-Takht and Ashtarlay districts have become less secure due to the presence of "illegal gunmen" such as the Pesaran-i-Mublaigh group, led by former jihadi commanders who reportedly captured 23 policemen in late August 2015 ([588]).

According to an international organisation, as of September 2015 a substantial number of schools were closed due to the Taliban's presence as it ideologically opposes the education of girls ([589]).

As stated by UNODC in December 2015, Daikundi was the only province in the southern part of the country ([590]) where security was generally good, with the exception of Kajran district ([591]). Kajran – where ANA troops were reportedly deployed in 2015 ([592]) – was regarded as unstable by Pajhwok Afghan News since it also borders the province of Helmand ([593]).

According to residents of Kajran, the district was on the brink of falling under Taliban control in March 2015. A member of the provincial council stated that seven villages including Gharma, Menara and Chobzar had already fallen to the Taliban, with security forces having been deployed to the area, which, according to the source, apparently was not sufficient. However, a security official stated that Kajran was under the control of the government ([594]).

According to UNAMA, the ALP programme has not been present in Daikundi ([595]).

([581]) Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Central Statistics Organization, Socio-demographic and Economic Survey – Daykundi, 2012, p. 15.

([582]) UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015, Cultivation and Production, December 2015, pp. 12-13.

([583]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([584]) Die Zeit, Bei den Hazara von Daikundi, 5 January 2014; ISW, Regional Command South, Day Kundi province, n.d.

([585]) Khaama Press, President Ghani appoints female governor for Daikundi province, 5 June 2015; International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015.

([586]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kajran district may fall to Taliban, residents warn, 25 March 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi security forces professionally improved: officials, 30 March 2015.

([587]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi security, stability top priority: PC, 31 May 2015; Tolo News, Daykundi Resident's Protest over Irresponsible Armed Men, 8 April 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi residents protest against Mubaligh brothers, 31 March 2015.

([588]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal armed men's influence growing in Daikundi: PC member, 30 August 2015.

([589]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015.

([590]) The UNODC report refers to Daikundi, Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan and Zabul as the Southern Region. UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015, Cultivation and Production, December 2015, p. 20.

([591]) UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015, Cultivation and Production, December 2015, p. 12.

([592]) Sada-e Azadi, Daikundi security forces professionally improved: officials, 31 March 2015.

([593]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kajran district may fall to Taliban, residents warn, 25 March 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi security forces professionally improved: officials, 30 March 2015.

([594]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kajran district may fall to Taliban, residents warn, 25 March 2015.

([595]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 67.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Daikundi Province counted 48 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([596]):

Violence targeting individuals	7
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	26
Explosions	8
Security enforcement	6
Non-conflict related incidents	1
Other incidents	0
Total security incidents	**48**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Daykundi province ([597]):

Kajran	18	Shahristan	2
Khadir	14	Gizab	1
Ishtarlay	7	Miramor	1
Kiti	2	Sangh-e Takht	1
Nili	2		

In March 2016, **Kajran** residents expressed fear about a possible spillover of security threats into their area from Baghran district of Helmand and Charchino town of Uruzgan provinces. According to the head of the Kajran Ulema Council, the district was facing a serious security threat from the two neighbouring districts with the Taliban planning to spread its activities to central Afghanistan through Kajran as part of its spring offensive. A provincial council member from Kajran said that several residents of Daikundi Province had been killed or wounded by the AGEs en route to Helmand and Uruzgan provinces ([598]).

Nearly a dozen security checkposts fell to the Taliban in **Gizab** district in the end of May 2016. ANA admitted a shortage of troops there but denied the district had fallen ([599]).

Displacement

According to UNHCR and UN OCHA, there were no IDPs recorded in or out of Daikundi from September 2015 until 29 May 2016 ([600]).

([596]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([597]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([598]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi governor pledges improved security, 10 March 2016.

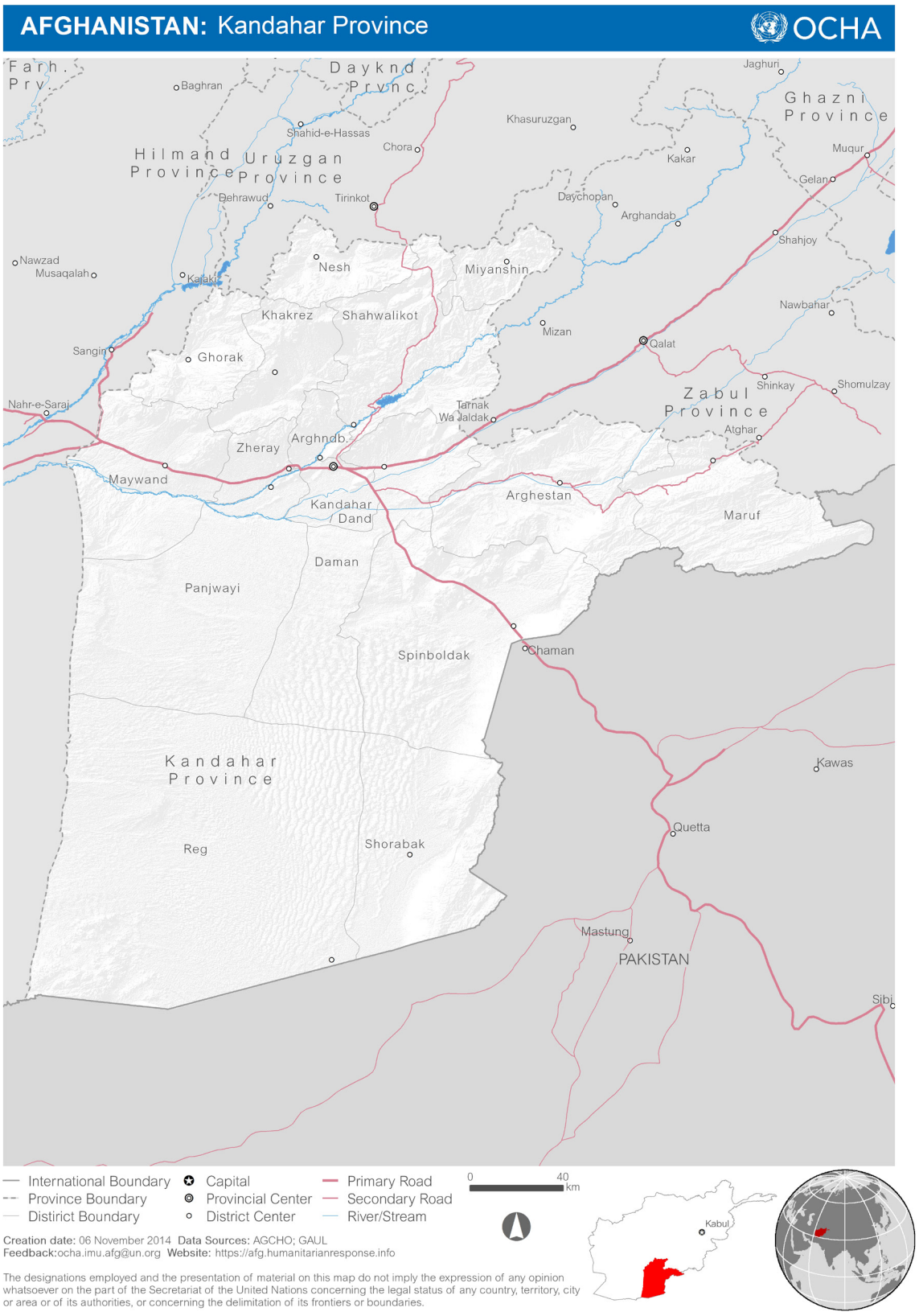
([599]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban overrun 11 police check-posts in Uruzgan's Gizab district, 31 May 2016.

([600]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, September 2015; UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, October 2015; UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, November 2015; UNHCR, Afghanistan conflict-induced internal displacement 2015: the year in review, April 2016; UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Conflict Induced Displacements - Snapshot (1 January - 30 April 2016), 15 May 2016; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced displacements, Actual displacements between 1 January 2016 and 29 May 2016, 5 June 2016.

2.3. South

2.3.1. Kandahar

General description of the province



The southern province of Kandahar is surrounded by Uruzgan Province in the north, Zabul Province in the east and Helmand Province in the west, while it borders Pakistan in the south ([601]).

Kandahar consists of Kandahar City and the districts of Dand, Zheray, Daman, Arghandab, Arghestan, Panjwayi, Maruf, Spinboldak, Maywand, Shahwalikot, Khakrez, Nesh, Ghorak, Reg, Miyanshin and Shorabak ([602]).

Most of the province is flat or semi-flat desert, although the northern areas are mountainous ([603]). Kandahar is known as a commercial hub of the country ([604]).The agricultural products of the province include grape, pomegranate, apricot, peach, melon, watermelon, wheat, corn, fig, almond, orange and apple ([605]). According to UNODC, opium poppy cultivation decreased by 38 % from 33,713 hectares in 2014 to 21,020 hectares in 2015 in Kandahar Province where the main cultivation districts were Maywand, Zheray and Panjwayi ([606]).

UN OCHA estimated the 2015 population to be at 1,226,593 ([607]). Kandahar is overwhelmingly Pashtun with the Durrani and Ghilzai tribes forming the majority but small numbers of Baluchis, Hazaras and Tajiks also live in the province ([608]).

Dr. Humayun Azizi was appointed as new governor of Kandahar in April 2015 ([609]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Kandahar

Kandahar was where Mullah Omar's Taliban emerged in the 1990s ([610]) and regaining control over Kandahar City has been one of the Taliban's most important goals since 2001 ([611]). The presence of AQIS, the newest regional branch of al Qaeda's international organisation, was also noted in the province ([612]).

Foschini (Afghanistan Analysts Network) reported in April 2015 that, according to residents, central areas of Kandahar Province felt relatively safer compared to the daily violence experienced in previous years. Statistics developed by an independent monitoring organisation showed that Panjwayi witnessed the most dramatic drop in insurgent incidents among Kandahar districts (from 345 in 2013 to 44 in 2014) and security forces were reportedly trying to bring neighbouring Zheray under the same degree of control, while districts such as Maywand or Shahwalikot remained affected by daily insurgent operations ([613]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Kandahar Province counted 1,880 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([614]):

Violence targeting individuals	82
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	1,064
Explosions	163
Security enforcement	540
Non-conflict related incidents	25
Other incidents	6
Total security incidents	**1,880**

([601]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of KandaharProvince, n.d.

([602]) UNOCHA, Kandahar Province – Reference Map [map], 19 February 2014.

([603]) ISW, Regional Command South, Kandahar province, n.d.

([604]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Kandahar Province, n.d.

([605]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Kandahar Province, n.d.

([606]) UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015, Cultivation and Production, December 2015, pp. 21-22.

([607]) UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([608]) ISW, Regional Command South, Kandahar province, n.d.

([609]) Khaama Press, Humayun Azizi appointed as new governor of Kandahar, 27 April 2015.

([610]) ISW, Afghanistan Threat Assessment: The Taliban and ISIS, 11 December 2015, pp. 3-4.

([611]) ISW, The Taliban's campaign for Kandahar, December 2009.

([612]) Joscelyn, T., Al Qaeda's Kandahar training camp 'probably the largest' in Afghan War, 31 October 2015.

([613]) Foschini, Fabrizio: Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, 3 July 2015.

([614]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Kandahar province ([615]):

Maywand	468	Zhari	71
Shah Wali Kot	216	Arghandab	57
Kandahar	213	Daman	53
Khakrez	150	Panjwayi	33
Maruf	142	Shobarak	31
Arghistan	118	Dand	30
Ghorak	93	Nesh	30
Miya Nishin	93	Reg	2
Spin Boldak	79	Dishu	1

According to Pajhwok Afghan News in October 2015, security incidents had increased in **Maywand**, **Ghorak**, **Shahwalikot** and some other areas of the province ([616]).

In **Shahwalikot** district at least 19 AGEs, including eight suicide bombers, were killed when a group of Taliban fighters attacked ALP posts in September 2015 ([617]). Twenty eight AGEs were killed and another four were captured later in the month during a search operation that largely focused on the Zangal area of the district. The operation was launched after AGEs closed the Kandahar-Uruzgan highway that passes through the district ([618]). In December 2015, suspected Taliban fighters broke into the house of a tribal elder and gunned down his four sons in Zangitan area of the district. The Alokozai tribal elder once served as district chief but had no government job or personal feud ([619]).

At least four policemen were killed in a suspected insider attack in Shahwalikot in March 2016. The assailant officer managed to flee the area after the attack, taking several weapons and ammunition with him. At least 11 policemen were also missing following the incident ([620]). The Taliban shadow governor for Kandahar Province was killed along with 43 fighters during an operation in Kata Sang area of the district in early May 2016 ([621]). Overall, more than 80 Taliban fighters were killed or wounded in a series of operations conducted by the ANSF in the vicinity of Shahwalikot district in May 2016, focusing on clearing the Kandahar-Tirinkot highway ([622]). An Afghan army general was also killed in an explosion after visiting Afghan army checkposts in the district in May 2016. Earlier, another Afghan army general died as a result of an attack by militants in Dand district in March 2016 ([623]).

Taliban fighters attacked a border police compound in **Spinboldak** in October 2015. One border policeman and all four attackers were killed in the incident ([624]). Three Taliban fighters were killed during an attack on a police centre in the district in January 2016 ([625]). In April 2016, at least seven policemen were killed in a suspected insider attack in Spinboldak district. The Taliban has claimed that the attack was carried out as part of the summer offensive launched under the name of Omari Operations ([626]).

Insider attacks were also reported in other parts of the province: at least four policemen were killed in a suspected insider attack in **Khakrez** district in January 2016 ([627]); in the Abdul Rauf area of **Zheray**district at least 5 policemen lost their lives in February 2016 ([628]); seven policemen with the ALP were shot in **Arghandab** district in March 2016 by ALP forces who apparently had links with the AGEs ([629]); and two Romanian special forces soldiers were killed and a third wounded when members of the local police unit they were training with shot them in the city of **Kandahar** in early May 2016 ([630]).

([615]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([616]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kandahar suicide bombing leaves policeman dead, 13 October 2015.

([617]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 suicide bombers among 14 rebels killed in Kandahar, 12 September 2015.

([618]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 28 insurgents eliminated in Shah Walikot operation, 28 September 2015.

([619]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Gunmen kill 4 sons of Kandahar tribal elder, 20 December 2015.

([620]) Khaama Press, 4 policemen martyred, 11 missing following an insider attack in Kandahar, 1 March 2016.

([621]) Khaama Press, Taliban shadow governor Haji Lala killed with his 43 fighter in Kandahar, 2 May 2016.

([622]) Khaama Press, Over 80 Taliban insurgents killed, wounded in Kandahar: 205th Atal Corps, 17 May 2016.

([623]) Khaama Press, Top Afghan army general Abdul Basir Sharwand martyred in Kandahar explosion, 19 May 2016.

([624]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban attack on Kandahar police building ends, 21 October 2015.

([625]) Khaama Press, Three Taliban killed in Kandahar attack, 25 January 2016.

([626]) Khaama Press, 7 policemen killed in a suspected insider attack in Kandahar, 12 April 2016.

([627]) Khaama Press, 4 Afghan policemen martyred in suspected insider attack in Kandahar, 16 January 2016.

([628]) Khaama Press, 5 policemen martyred, 6 wounded in an insider attack in Kandahar, 11 February 2016.

([629]) Khaama Press, Insider attack claims lives of 7 policemen in Kandahar province, 24 March 2016.

([630]) RFE/RL, Two NATO Soldiers Killed In Afghan 'Insider' Attack, 7 May 2016.

One child was killed and two others were wounded in a roadside bomb incident in Sher Ali Karez area of **Maywand** district in September 2015 ([631]). A suicide bomber attacked a police checkpoint in the SoorBaghal area of the district in October 2015, killing one policeman and injuring another ([632]). In August 2016, four civilians were killed by a roadside bomb in Maywand district ([633]).

In **Shorabak** district two large al Qaeda training facilities were raided by US forces in October 2015. Since the beginning of 2015, Pakistani authorities have carried out several raids against AQIS. However, according to Pakistani officials, AQIS has relocated a significant portion of its operations not just into Kandahar, but also into Helmand ([634]).

Twenty five AGEs were killed after they attacked security posts in **Ghorak** district and were repelled in an operation backed by Afghan air force ([635]).

A female employee of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan was shot dead in October 2015 by unidentified gunmen in the Arg Bazaar area of the fourth police district in **Kandahar** City ([636]). In November 2015, an NDS employee was killed in a hit-and-run attack in the second police district of the provincial capital ([637]). In December 2015, Taliban fighters wearing military uniforms forced their way into the Kandahar International Airport, opening fire on security personnel at the entrance ([638]). Regarding the casualties, sources differ: Pajhwok Afghan News reported 51 dead and 35 injured, while, according to AFP, 37 people were killed and 35 wounded ([639]). In late December 2015, two unidentified gunmen killed a female anti-polio campaigner and seriously wounded her granddaughter in Kandahar City ([640]). In March 2016, a mosque custodian was killed by the Taliban in the provincial capital for allegedly working for the intelligence services ([641]). A policewoman was shot by armed motorcyclists in May 2016 near the Zahir Shahee High School in Kandahar City ([642]).

Displacement

UNHCR did not document any IDPs originating from or to Kandahar in September 2015 ([643]). According to UNHCR, 366 families/1,792 individuals were identified as recent conflict-induced IDPs in Herat in October 2015, mainly displaced from unstable districts of Badghis, Farah, Faryab, Helmand and Kandahar provinces ([644]). In November 2015, UNHCR stated that 410 families were profiled as IDPs in Ghazni Province and 30 % of them originated from Maidan Wardak, Uruzgan, Kandahar, Zabul and Jawzjan provinces ([645]). Kandahar was among the provinces that reported more than 2,000 IPDs in 2015 ([646]).

According to UNOCHA, between 1 January 2016 and 29 May 2016, there were 11,646 individuals displaced to Kandahar, 9,599 of them originating from the same province. 621 individuals were displaced to Reg, 214 to Shorabak, 318 to Arghestan and 310 to Khakrez. 7,745 individuals were displaced to Maywand, 322 of them from Nahr-e Saraj, Helmand province. 1,686 individuals were displaced to Danddistrict, 1,298 of them from Sangin, Helmand province, 63 of them from Ghorak and 325 from Shahwalikot. Ghorak also hosted 427 individuals from Sangin and there were 595 individuals displaced to Shahwalikot ([647]).

([631]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 28 insurgents eliminated in Shah Walikot operation, 28 September 2015.

([632]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kandahar suicide bombing leaves policeman dead, 13 October 2015.

([633]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 civilians dead in Kandahar roadside explosion, 12 August 2016.

([634]) Joscelyn, T., Al Qaeda's Kandahar training camp 'probably the largest' in Afghan War, 31 October 2015.

([635]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kandahar clashes leave 37 Taliban dead, 12 October 2015.

([636]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Female worker of UNAMA gunned down in Kandahar attack, 12 October 2015.

([637]) Pajhwok Afghan News, NDS worker gunned down in Kandahar, 28 November 2016.

([638]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban militants storm Kandahar airport; clash ongoing, 8 December 2015; AFP, 37 killed in Taliban siege at Afghan airport, 9 December 2015.

([639]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 51 dead, 35 injured in Kandahar airport assault, 9 December 2015; AFP, 37 killed in Taliban siege at Afghan airport, 9 December 2015.

([640]) RFE/RL, Female Antipolio Volunteer Shot Dead In Afghanistan, 28 December 2015.

([641]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 58.

([642]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Policewoman gunned down by motorcyclists in Kandahar, 4 May 2016.

([643]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, September 2015.

([644]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, October 2015 p. 4.

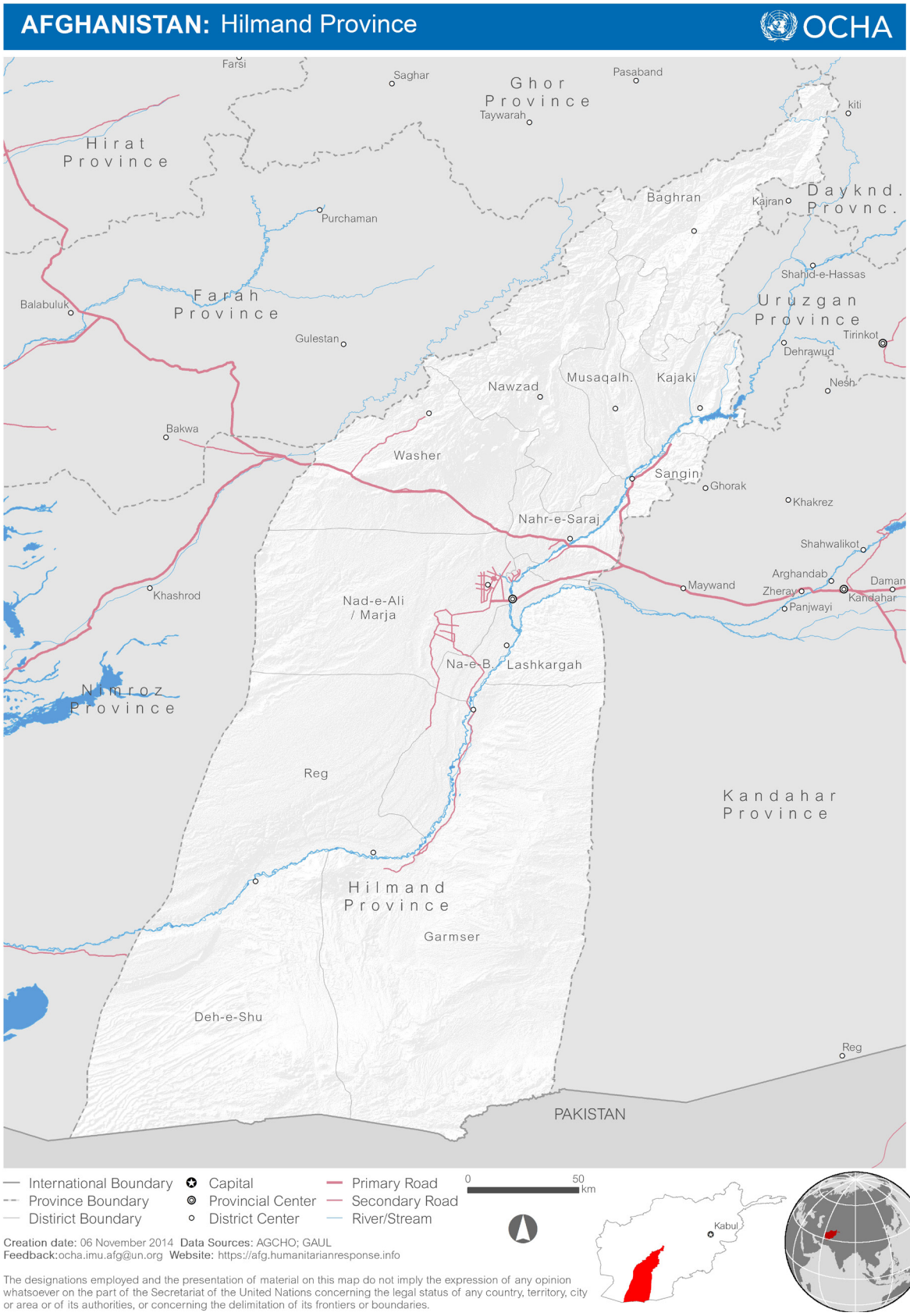
([645]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, November 2015 p. 4.

([646]) UNHCR, Afghanistan conflict-induced internal displacement 2015: the year in review, April 2016.

([647]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced displacements, Actual displacements between 1 January 2016 and 29 May 2016, 5 June 2016.

2.3.2. Helmand

General description of the province



Helmand is Afghanistan's largest province with about 60,000 square kilometres ([648]). It is surrounded by Kandahar Province in the east, Uruzgan, Daikundi and Ghor provinces in the north, Farah and Nimroz provinces in the west and shares a 162-kilometre-long border with Pakistan. The provincial capital is Lashkargah ([649]). Helmand Province consists of the following districts: Baghran, Deh-e-Shu, Garmser, Kajaki, Lashkargah, Musaqala, Nad-e Ali/Marja, Nahr-e Saraj (also known as Gereshk), Nawa-e Barakzai (also known as Nawa), Nawzad, Reg (also known as Khaneshin), Sangin, Washer ([650]).

The high mountains of the Hindu Kush are located in the northern parts of Helmand, while the area in the south is known as the 'Desert of Death'. Nearly all of Helmand's population lives along the Helmand River ([651]).

According to UNODC, Helmand remained Afghanistan's single largest opium poppy cultivating province in 2015, accounting for 47 % of the total area under opium poppy cultivation in the country. Cultivation levels in 2015 were highest in Nad-e Ali, Nahr-e Saraj, Kajaki, Garmser, Khaneshin, Musaqala, Nawzad, Sangin, Deh-e-Shu, Nawa-eBarakzai and Baghran. Opium poppy cultivation decreased by 16 % from 103,240 hectares in 2014 to 86,443 hectares in 2015. This decrease mainly occurred in the north of the province ([652]).

UN OCHA estimated the 2015 population to be 924,711 for Helmand Province ([653]). The majority is Pashtun but small numbers of Balochis, Hazaras and Tajiks also live there ([654]).

Mirza Khan Rahimi was introduced as the new governor for Helmand in June 2015 ([655]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Helmand

Control of Helmand is at the centre of the long-term strategy of the Taliban, which can be explained partly in economic terms. Afghanistan produces most of the world's opium and Helmand is the centre for production, so 'whoever calls the shots in the province can get a sizeable share of drug business' which always had been an important source of funding for the AGEs. The Taliban sees Helmand as a stepping stone to other areas, since it has good exit routes across the border to Pakistan and through neighbouring Nimroz Province to Iran and also has strong supply lines to other parts of the country ([656]).

11,000 US troops came to Helmand in 2009 as part of an attempt by President Obama to weaken the insurgency before the withdrawal scheduled for the end of 2014. Those troops sent to Helmand represented more than half of the overall increase in troops (21,000), indicating the importance of the province in the Afghanistan-wide fight ([657]). The Taliban was repelled, but retained presence in the north of Helmand, including Baghran, most of Kajaki and Musaqala. In the wake of the troops withdrawal in late 2014, the AGEs advanced into northern and central Helmand ([658]). By the end of 2014, most foreign troops had left Afghanistan, with ISAF becoming RS (Resolute Support), a strictly non-combat 'train, assist and advise' mission ([659]).

In 2015, Helmand was one of the most volatile areas in Afghanistan with repeated offensives by the AGEs and counter-offensives by the security forces, particularly in the districts of Sangin, Kajaki and Musaqala ([660]). The Taliban held and even expanded its level of control in various districts across the province, aided by the effective use of the new

([648]) Reuters, FACTBOX-Facts about Afghanistan's Helmand province, 18 July 2009.

([649]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Recognition of southern Helmand province, n.d.

([650]) UNOCHA, Hilmand Province – Reference Map [map], 19 February 2014; Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, 10 March 2016.

([651]) Reuters, FACTBOX-Facts about Afghanistan's Helmand province, 18 July 2009.

([652]) UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015, Cultivation and Production, December 2015, p. 21.

([653]) UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([654]) ISW, Regional Command South, Helmand province, n.d.

([655]) Pajhwok Afghan News, New Helmand governor vows improved security, 4 June 2015.

([656]) Osman, B., Why capturing Helmand is top of the Taleban's strategic goals, 28 December 2015.

([657]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, 10 March 2016.

([658]) Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016.

([659]) Amiri, R.: Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, 10 March 2016.

([660]) UNHCR, Afghanistan conflict-induced internal displacement 2015: the year in review, April 2016.

qet'a system and the weapons, ammunition and equipment looted from captured ANSF bases ([661]). Taliban training camps and hideouts of drug smugglers were operational in Deh-e-Shu and Khaneshin. The establishment of al Qaeda training facilities in Baramcha town, in the district of Deh-e-Shu was also reported. Al Qaeda-linked groups, such as the Indian Muhajideen and Laskhar-e-Jhangvi, were involved ([662]).

In the second half of 2015 entire areas of Helmand Province started to fall to the Taliban ([663]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Helmand Province counted 1,828 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([664]):

Violence targeting individuals	28
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	1,598
Explosions	108
Security enforcement	89
Non-conflict related incidents	1
Other incidents	4
Total security incidents	**1,828**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Helmand province ([665]):

Marja	461	Naw Zad	56
Nahr-e Saraj	280	Musa Qala	37
Sangin	245	Nawa-i Barak Zayi	37
Nad Ali	217	Garmser	23
Lashkar Gah	166	Washer	13
Dishu	161	Greshk	6
Kajaki	122	Khanasin	4

As of late May 2016, the Taliban was in full control of four districts – Baghran, Musaqala, Nawzad and Deh-e-Shu – and some parts of Lashkargah ([666]), while Kajaki, Sangin, Nad-e Ali, Gereshk, Marja and Khaneshin were partially controlled by the group ([667]). According to Al Jazeera, the Taliban controlled or contested 10 districts in Helmand Province as of August 2016 ([668]).

Deh-e-Shu and **Baghran** districts have been under Taliban control for the past 10 years ([669]).

([661]) Up until Akhtar Mohammad Mansour took over as the de facto leader of the Taliban, the movement's forces had mainly been based on the *mahaz* (front) system. As part of a multi-level hierarchy of district and provincial commanders, ultimately falling under the movement's military commission, each *mahaz* was locally mobilised by a commander. For any major offensive, each *mahaz* would be asked to contribute fighters who would go home to their own areas after the operation. This approach was expensive to equip and maintain, while often it was not very effective. As a result of restructuring the Taliban's military organisation, the mahaz system has been supplemented with a more permanent, military-like structure – the *qet'a* (meaning unit in Dari, Pashto and originally in Arabic). The new system is based on groups of up to 220 fighters with sub-groups of 20 men who operate together. Compared to the *mahaz* fighters, those in the *qet'a* are more mobile, better trained and equipped, and are shifted around within a province or even between provinces. Given their success in Helmand, the Taliban is using the *qet'as* strategically in Kandahar, Zabul and Kunduz: Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016.

([662]) Roggio, B. and Joscelyn, T., Al Qaeda operates in southern Helmand province, 24 October 2015.

([663]) Amiri, R.: Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016.

([664]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([665]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([666]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 57 police confirmed killed in Helmand clashes, 30 May 2016.

([667]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Police facing multiple challenges in Helmand: Official, 22 May 2016.

([668]) Al Jazeera, Thousands flee fierce fighting in Afghanistan's Helmand, 9 August, 2016.

([669]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, Afghanistan Analysts Network, 10 March 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban in control of 4 Helmand districts, 24 December 2015.

With its relatively large population and large bazaar, **Musaqala** is the heart of northern Helmand and is one of the major hubs of the opium trade. In August 2015, it was captured by the Taliban ([670]). Although the security forces managed to take some areas back in December 2015, Musaqala has been under Taliban control since February 2016 when troops were ordered to retreat from there to reinforce Gereshk ([671]).

With its isolated location and lack of security forces, **Nawzad** has been an ideal transit point for drug smugglers for the past 10 years ([672]). At least 19 Afghan border police officers were killed in the district when Taliban fighters stormed their posts in October 2015 ([673]). ANA Special Forces raided a prison in December 2015 in Bar Nawzad area and freed 17 policemen, 19 local policemen, 21 civilians and three de-miners. According to the spokesman for the 215th Maiwand Military Corps, the released men spent more than two years in a Taliban jail ([674]). In February 2016, Afghan government forces pulled out of Nawzad as 'a tactical decision to reposition forces to fight the Taliban more effectively', leaving no troops in the district ([675]).

Although **Kajaki** has a relatively small population compared to other districts in the province, it is strategically and economically important because of its hydro-electric power station ([676]). Twenty Taliban fighters were killed and 35 others wounded in two days of clashes in the district in September 2015. Kajaki Social Council's head stated that the Taliban captured most areas of the district ([677]). As of March 2016, in Kajaki only the district centre and the dam located close to it were still under the control of the ANSF, according to AAN ([678]).

Sangin, bordering Musaqala to the southeast, is the other large centre for drug trade and smuggling. Sangin has also been important to the Taliban because the road connecting the Kajaki Dam and Lashkargah also runs through the district ([679]). In November at least 65 ANA soldiers surrendered to the Taliban in Sangin ([680]). Police sources stated in late December 2015 that the Taliban had captured the district, a claim rejected by the governor of Helmand Province ([681]). British troops have reportedly been deployed to Helmand to help Afghan security forces retake control of Sangin, but, according to the UK Defence Ministry, they would not take any combat role and would only provide advisory support ([682]). As of March 2016, only some parts of Sangin district are under government control. The main road connecting the district with the southern areas of Helmand Province is now the dividing line between the Taliban and the Afghan security forces. The areas to the north, northeast and west of the district centre are held by the Taliban, while the district centre and the bazaar are held by the government, although they are highly contested ([683]).

Gereshk is not only the second most populated area in the province after Lashkargah, with its district centre being the second-biggest city after the provincial capital, it is also in a highly strategic location. It connects the northern and central part of Helmand and the ring road also passes through the district ([684]). The district came under serious military pressure in October 2015 with heavy fighting occurring for several days, which threatened the provincial capital and the ring road as well ([685]). The Taliban captured all the posts in the Malgir area of the district in October 2015 and began an offensive against two villages in Zanbulai area in December 2015. During this attack, the Taliban did not only target ALP fighters but the local population as well, inflicting significant civilian causalities ([686]). Deh Adam Khan was captured by the Taliban in mid-January 2016 ([687]). According to AAN, as of March 2016 about 99 % of

([670]) BBC, Afghanistan Helmand violence: At least 19 police killed, 14 October 2015.
Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, Afghanistan Analysts Network, 10 March 2016.

([671]) Khaama Press, Army pulled out of Helmand's Musa Qala District, 20 February 2016; Amiri, R.: Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, Afghanistan Analysts Network, 10 March 2016.

([672]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, Afghanistan Analysts Network, 10 March 2016.

([673]) BBC, Afghanistan Helmand violence: At least 19 police killed, 14 October 2015.

([674]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 60 people freed from Taliban prison in Helmand raid, 4 December 2015.

([675]) RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Pull Out Of Two Southern Districts, 22 February 2016.

([676]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, Afghanistan Analysts Network, 10 March 2016.

([677]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 Taliban eliminated in Kajaki fighting, ANA claims, 17 September 2015.

([678]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, Afghanistan Analysts Network, 10 March 2016.

([679]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, Afghanistan Analysts Network, 10 March 2016.

([680]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 65 soldiers have surrendered to Taliban: Helmand governor, 14 November 2015.

([681]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture Helmand's Sangin, besiege 150 police, 20 December 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Sangin has not fallen to Taliban, says Helmand governor, 21 December 2015.

([682]) Pajhwok Afghan News, British troops mobilised to help retake Sangin from Taliban, 22 December 2015.

([683]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, 10 March 2016; Amiri, R.: Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016.

([684]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, 10 March 2016.

([685]) Reuters, Taliban threatens southern Afghan city, civilians flee, 20 October 2015.

([686]) Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016.

([687]) Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016; Tolo News, Villages In Helmand's Gereshk Fall to Taliban, 16 January 2016.

Malgir is under Taliban control with the exception of a few checkposts between Spin Masjad and Gereshk Bazaar ([688]). Taliban fighters attacked the police headquarters and intelligence agency offices in the district in March 2016 but were repelled by security forces ([689]). At least 27 police were killed and 26 wounded in Shawal area of Nad Ali and 25 more police were killed and nine wounded in Malgir area of Gereshk district during two days of clashes in late May 2016 ([690]). In August 2016, the Helmand–Kandahar highway was closed by the Taliban ([691]).

In late October 2015, Taliban fighters attacked security posts in **Nad-e Ali** district, leading to casualties on both sides ([692]). According to AAN, the AGEs captured Loya Manda, Kofaka and the villages of 31 Gharbi and 31 Sharqi. The Changir and Shawal areas of the district were attacked later and, by November 2015, these areas represented the new frontline ([693]). Nad-e Ali district was about 80 % under government control as of March 2016 ([694]). At least four people were killed and 12 others wounded in a car suicide bombing in the Du-Rahi area of Nad-e Ali in mid-May 2016. According to an eyewitness, a man wearing an ALP uniform drove his explosives-laden vehicle to the ALP academy and blew it up ([695]).

Maintaining security in the district of **Marja** in central Helmand has special significance due to its proximity to Lashkargah ([696]). The district came under pressure in October 2015 when fierce clashes were also taking place in the Babaji area and Nad-e Ali district of the province ([697]). Since November/December 2015, the Taliban has gained significant influence in Marja and since the beginning of February 2016 it has also taxed local communities ([698]). The ANA conducted air raids in Nad-e Ali, Marja and Nawa districts in late March 2016, leaving more than 100 Taliban fighters dead or wounded ([699]). At least 18 Taliban fighters were killed in Marja in the latest infighting between the supporters of Mullah Akhtar Mansour and Mullah Mohammad Rasool in early May 2016 ([700]). According to AAN, only small parts of the district, notably the district centre and areas around it, are under government control with other areas remaining highly contested ([701]).

As of March 2016, the government controlled the majority of the district of **Nawa** in central Helmand, where the ALP and ANP had a strong presence. This, along with little support from the local population, has made it difficult for the Taliban to gain more control ([702]). In early May 2016, at least 30 fighters were killed during a clash between fighters loyal to Mullah Akhtar Mansour and Mullah Rasool ([703]).

As explained by AAN, the district of **Garmser** was mostly under government control as of March 2016, while in **Khaneshin** only the district centre was government-controlled ([704]). Reports emerged in mid-March that the Taliban had taken control of Khaneshin district following a coordinated attack ([705]). However, it was also reported later that ANSF had retaken full control of the district ([706]).

The district centre of **Washer** is still under government control as of March 2016, just like parts of the ring road crossing the district. According to AAN, security forces are able to control this part of the ring road and its connection to the district centre during the day but at night it falls under Taliban control ([707]).

([688]) Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016.

([689]) RFE/RL, Taliban Militants Attack Government Offices In Helmand, 9 March 2016.

([690]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 57 police confirmed killed in Helmand clashes, 30 May 2016.

([691]) Tolo News [Twitter], 23 August 2016.

([692]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 killed as clashes in Helmand continue, 18 October 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 policemen, several rebels killed in Nad Ali fighting, 19 October 2015.

([693]) Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016.

([694]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, 10 March 2016.

([695]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 killed, 12 wounded in Nadali suicide attack, 14 May 2016.

([696]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, 10 March 2016.

([697]) RFE/RL, Clashes Continue After A Southern Afghan District Falls To Taliban, 21 October 2015.

([698]) Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016.

([699]) Khaama Press, Over 100 Taliban insurgents killed in Helmand airstrikes, 26 March 2016.

([700]) Khaama Press, Infighting among Taliban leaves 18 dead in Helmand province, 9 May 2016.

([701]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, 10 March 2016.

([702]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, 10 March 2016.

([703]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Infighting leaves 30 Taliban dead in Helmand, 9 May 2016.

([704]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, 10 March 2016.

([705]) Khaama Press, 54 Taliban militants killed amid surging violence in Helmand province, 17 March 2016.

([706]) Khaama Press, Afghan forces retake full control of Khanshin district in Helmand, 27 March 2016.

([707]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, 10 March 2016.

Lashkargah, still more or less controlled by the government as of March 2016, was under serious pressure in October 2015 with heavy clashes occurring between Afghan government forces and Taliban fighters after the AGEs captured Malgir in Gereshk district ([708]). Local sources reported an additional 1,000 troops sent to the provincial capital after the city's Babaji district fell to the Taliban on October 20 ([709]). Taliban gunmen attacked police checkposts in Babaji in early May 2016 and established their checkposts five kilometres from Lashkargah, in Mokhtar locality. According to the group's spokesman, they have been in control of the Babaji area for the past six months ([710]). The fall of Babaji, according to AAN, was a direct consequence of the capture of Malgir since the areas have a common border. When the Taliban took over most of Gereshk and parts of Nad-e Ali, it also partly surrounded Lashkargah. With Babaji under control, the AGEs 'have a foot' in the provincial capital, as it is technically a suburb of Lashkargah ([711]).

Al Jazeera reported in August 2016 that the Taliban advance towards the provincial capital raised fears among residents about the potential fall of the city. However, US and Afghan officials insisted that 'they will not allow another urban centre to be captured' ([712]). The US deployed 100 troops to Laskargah because the Taliban closed in on the city centre ([713]).

Increased violence has impeded the delivery of services in Helmand. As of September 2015, 16 schools were closed due to security threats in Musaqala, six in Kajaki, 12 in Sangin and two in Nawzad districts. Out of 385 schools in the province, 247 were open to 193,000 students ([714]). In November 2015, the Taliban allowed schools in areas under its control to be reopened, months after they were closed due to security fears. According to the acting provincial education director, 51 schools had been closed in central parts of the province due to security threats, driving 31,000 students out of school ([715]).

The spokesman of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology confirmed in November 2015 that private mobile operators had stopped providing their services due to increasing incidents of violence in Helmand ([716]).

As of December 2015, 85 health facilities were operational in Lashkargah and in the districts, although 25 % of them were lacking proper buildings. Emergency clinics were situated in Sangin, Musaqala, Gereshk, Marja and Garmser districts. However, as the Public Health Director explained, despite all available resources, the health department was unable to provide facilities to those in areas affected by the conflict and the presence of AGEs ([717]).

Displacement

In 2015, as the conflict intensified, Helmand Province was one of the displacement-affected areas where the lack of access most severely hindered humanitarian action ([718]).

The protracted instability in the districts of Musaqala, Sangin and Nawzad triggered movements towards the southern part of the province, notably to Lashkargah in September 2015. In the beginning of the month 362 recent conflict-induced IDP families/2,882 individuals were assessed in Lashkargah City and 24 families/200 individuals in Gereshk, according to UNHCR. Several families had their houses destroyed as a result of the confrontations between the parties in conflict and restrictions to leave the areas of conflict and seek safety were also reported ([719]).

In November 2015 some 1,871 families/14,292 individuals were profiled in 43 different locations as newly conflict-induced IDPs, who originated largely from Marja (55 %), Sharwala (27 %), Nad-e Ali (13.5 %) and in lower proportions from Babaji, Kajaki, Musaqala, Nawzad and Sangin districts ([720]).

([708]) Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, 10 March 2016; Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016; RFE/RL, Clashes Continue After A Southern Afghan District Falls To Taliban, 21 October 2015.

([709]) RFE/RL, Clashes Continue After A Southern Afghan District Falls To Taliban, 21 October 2015.

([710]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 rebels, 3 police killed in clash near Lashkargah, 8 May 2016.

([711]) Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, 11 March 2016.

([712]) Al Jazeera, Thousands flee fierce fighting in Afghanistan's Helmand, 9 August, 2016.

([713]) Khaama Press, 100 American soldiers deployed to Helmand amid surge in violence, 23 August 2016.

([714]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Insecurity, not Taliban, challenge to Helmand schools, 25 September 2015.

([715]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban allow reopening of schools in Helmand, 23 November 2015.

([716]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Insecurity impedes delivery of telecom services in Helmand, 10 November 2015.

([717]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Insecurity hampers delivery of health services in Helmand, 17 December 2015.

([718]) UNHCR, Afghanistan conflict-induced internal displacement 2015: the year in review, April 2016.

([719]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, September 2015, p. 5.

([720]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, November 2015 p. 5.

About 5,000 families were displaced in December 2015 due to recent fighting in Helmand, according to the provincial council chairman who also mentioned that the displaced households had taken refuge in Lashkargah ([721]).

According to UN OCHA, between 1 January 2016 and 29 May 2016, there were 14,294 individuals displaced from Helmand, while it was the province of displacement for 11,996 individuals. 3,876 individuals were displaced to Reg, 2,857 to Lashkargah and 2,945 to Nahr-e Saraj. A smaller number of IDPs was registered in Deh-e-Shu, Nawa-e Barakzai, Nawzad and Musaqala ([722]).

The provincial governor's spokesman stated in August 2016 that about 30,000 had been displaced in Helmand in the previous weeks. Most of them were heading to Lashkargah where residents feared that the city could fall since soldiers were running out of supplies and the AGEs controlled all roads leading to the provincial capital ([723]).

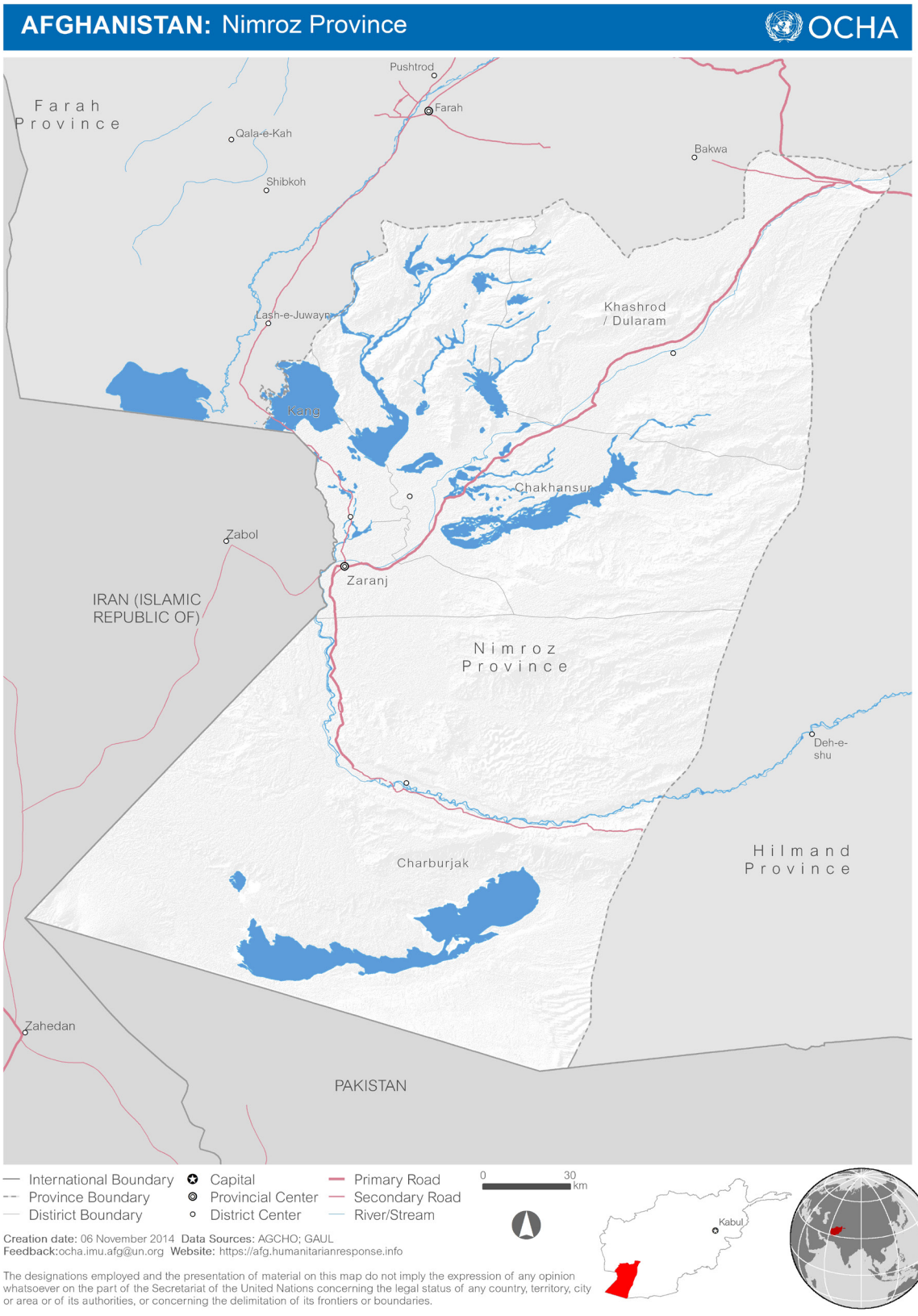
([721]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Helmand conflict displaces thousands of families, 31 December 2015.

([722]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced displacements, Actual displacements between 1 January 2016 and 29 May 2016, 5 June 2016.

([723]) Al Jazeera, Thousands flee fierce fighting in Afghanistan's Helmand, 9 August 2016.

2.3.3. Nimroz

General description of the province



The province of Nimroz is located in the south and shares a border with Iran to the west and Pakistan to the south. The province of Helmand is located to its east and Farah province to its north ([724]). Nimroz consists of the capital Zaranj and Charburjak, Chakhansur, Kang, Khashrod/Dularam districts ([725]).

The province is a desert area with significant water shortages for much of the year ([726]). According to UNODC, opium poppy cultivation in Nimroz decreased by 40 % from 14,584 hectares in 2014 to 8,805 hectares in 2015 ([727]).

UN OCHA estimated the population of Nimroz for 2015 at 164,978 ([728]). The Baloch (61 %) form the majority in the province; there is a significant Pashtun population (27 %) and Tajiks and nomads also live in Nimroz ([729]).

President Ashraf Ghani approved Mohammad Samiullah as the new governor for Nimroz province in May 2015 ([730]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Nimroz

Several projects were executed in parts of the province under the National Solidarity Programme in 2015, excluding Khashrod district where 37 projects remained incomplete due to security problems ([731]).

As of September 2015, at least 20 schools were closed by the Taliban with several others remaining shut due to security fears and at least two were torched. The affected schools were located in the outskirts of Zaranj City and in the districts of Charburjak and Khashrod ([732]). In October 2015, a primary school in Manar village of Khashrod district was rehabilitated and reopened. According to the district chief, three schools were operational in Khashrod: two in the district centre and the third in a rural area; schools in other areas were not functional due to security issues and the presence of AGEs ([733]).

The Taliban reportedly has established a 'quick reaction force' of 200-500 fighters which is operational in Farah, Nimroz and Herat ([734]). The 215th Corps of the ANA and ANP forces conducted military operations in the province ([735]). In December 2015, the Ministry of Interior promised the governor of Nimroz the deployment of 500 ALP personnel to Khashrod and Charburjak districts, along with a reinforcement of the border police to secure borders with neighbouring countries. A 85-kilometre portion of the 230-kilometre border with Iran is open and not controlled and Nimroz also shares a 220-kilometre border with Pakistan, 185 km of which is uncontrolled ([736]).

However, according to the information obtained by UNAMA in January 2016, the ALP programme is not present in Nimroz ([737]).

([724]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d.

([725]) UNOCHA, Nimroz Province – Reference Map [map], 19 February 2014.

([726]) Relief International, DFID GTF Project CN-367 Nimroz Province, Afghanistan, Final Evaluation, March 2013; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population Statistics, 8 September 2014.

([727]) UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015, Cultivation and Production, December 2015, p. 14.

([728]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([729]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d.; ISW, Regional Command South, Nimroz province, n.d.

([730]) Khaama Press, Eight more provinces will receive governors, 20 May 2015.

([731]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Hundreds of development projects executed in Nimroz, 12 January 2016.

([732]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Closure of Nimroz schools deprives many students of education, 16 September 2015.

([733]) Pajhwok Afghan News, School rehabilitated after 4 decades in Nimroz, 22 October 2015.

([734]) UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, pp. 9, 21.

([735]) Khaama Press, 23 militants killed in Nimroz operations, MoD claims, 1 May 2016.

([736]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 500 ALP personnel to secure Nimroz borders with Iran, Pakistan, 2 December 2015.

([737]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 67.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Nimroz Province counted 111 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([738]):

Violence targeting individuals	15
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	48
Explosions	18
Security enforcement	19
Non-conflict related incidents	11
Other incidents	0
Total security incidents	**111**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Nimroz province ([739]):

Khash Rod	60	Chakhansur	5
Zaranj	32	Kang	3
Chahar Burjak	10	Dilaram	1

According to Khaama Press, Nimroz is among the relatively volatile provinces in Afghanistan with AGEs operating in a number of districts ([740]).

Local authorities stated that **Khashrod** and **Dularam** districts were under threat from the Taliban based in Helmand and Farah provinces as of September 2015 ([741]).

In **Khashrod** district six ANA soldiers were killed and at least three others wounded in September 2015 when AGEs attacked a checkpost in Deh Mazang village ([742]). In October 2015, six policemen were killed along with two AGEs during a clash. According to the Taliban, two of the attackers were AGEs who had infiltrated police ranks[743]. In May 2016, three Taliban fighters, including two Pakistanis and two policemen, were killed during a clash ([744]).

In **Charburjak** district the Taliban attacked the Kamal Khan Dam in September 2015 but faced strong resistance from the security forces. According to the district chief, there were enough security personnel in the area and there was no threat of losing security posts ([745]). A mother and her son were killed in Charburjak when their car was hit by a roadside bomb in September 2015 in Rodbar village ([746]). Another roadside bomb claimed the lives of two civilians in December 2015 in the same village. According to Khaama Press, Rodbar is the most restive area in Charburjak district ([747]).

In **Zaranj**, the provincial capital of Nimroz, unidentified gunmen killed the former director of Hajj and Religious Affairs in November 2015 ([748]). In February 2016, unknown gunmen shot an employee of the Prosecutor's office and another civilian in the 5th police district of Zaranj ([749]). In May 2016, nearly 200 school students, including girls, were poisoned in Zaranj with gas at Shahid Naheed and Shahid Gul Makai Schools ([750]). A few days earlier a similar attack occurred at Malalai school in Zaranj with nearly 40 girls poisoned ([751]).

([738]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([739]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([740]) Khaama Press, 23 militants killed in Nimroz operations, MoD claims, 1 May 2016.

([741]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Afghan soldiers killed, 3 wounded in Nimroz attack, 6 September 2015.

([742]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Afghan soldiers killed, 3 wounded in Nimroz attack, 6 September 2015; Tolo News, Six Soldiers Killed in Nimroz Attack, 7 September 2015.

([743]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 policemen, 2 insurgents killed in Nimroz clash, 12 October 2015.

([744]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Bomber among 6 killed in Nimroz incidents, 14 May 2016.

([745]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 insurgents killed after botched attack on Nimroz dam, 13 September 2015.

([746]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Mother, son lose life in Nimroz blast, 27 September 2015; Khaama Press, Landmine blast kills mother, son in Nimroz, 27 September 2015.

([747]) Khaama Press, Roadside bomb blast claims two lives in Nimroz, 23 December 2015.

([748]) Khaama Press, Unknown gunmen kill former director of Hajj and Religious Affairs in Nimroz, 29 November 2015.

([749]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Nimroz prosecutor gunned down along with civilian, 15 February 2016.

([750]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 200 schoolchildren fall unconscious after Nimroz gas attack, 17 May 2016.

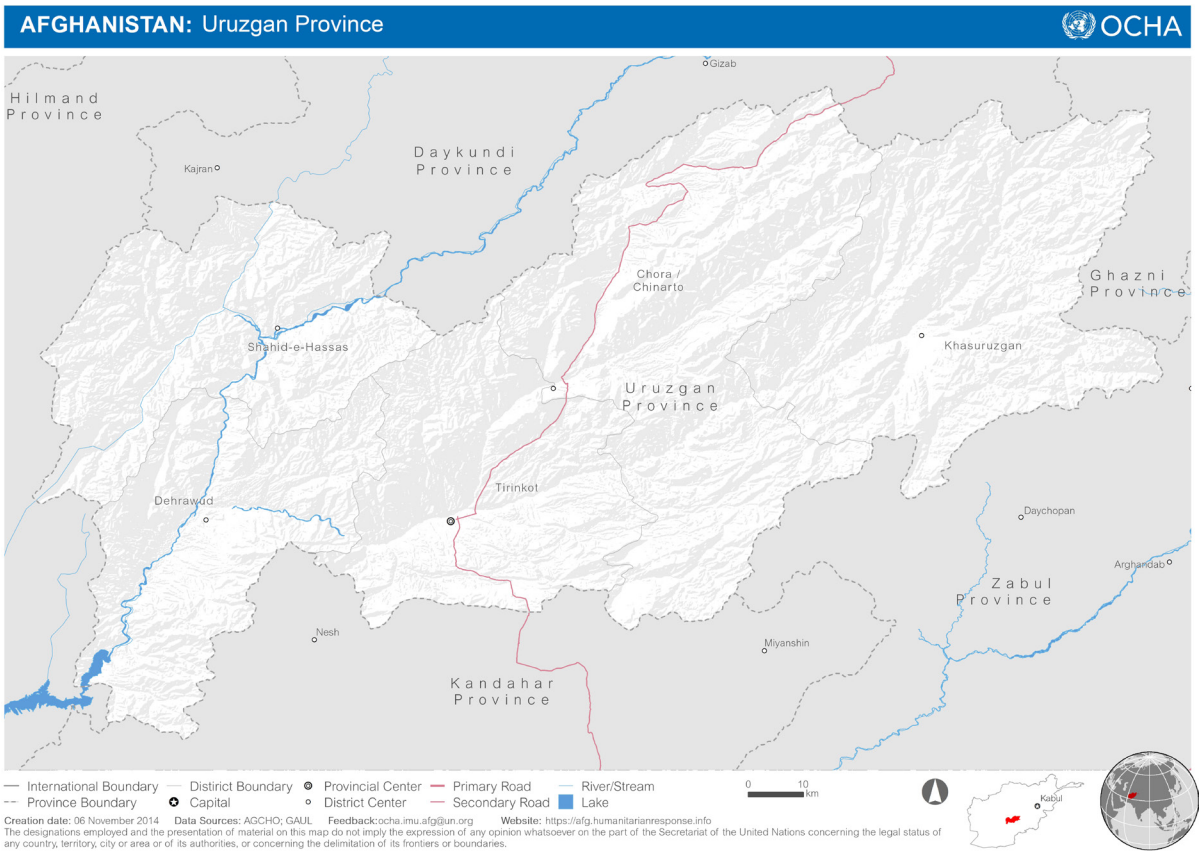
([751]) Tolo News, Schoolgirls Poisoned In Nimroz, 12 May 2016.

Displacement

UNHCR profiled 125 families/856 individuals as conflict-induced IDPs in the province of Nimroz in September 2015 ([752]). Small-scale displacements were profiled in the province in October-November 2015 but no numbers were cited by UNHCR ([753]). According to UN OCHA, between 1 January 2016 and 29 May 2016, there were 479 individuals displaced in Nimroz Province, 88 of them in Khashrod district. The remaining 391 displaced individuals were located in Zaranj – 251 of them were displaced from Nad-e Ali/Marja, Helmand Province and 140 of them originated from Gulestan, Farah province ([754]).

2.3.4. Uruzgan

General description of the province



The province of Uruzgan, also pronounced "Rozgan", is situated at the southern foothills of the Hindu Kush, surrounded by the provinces of Daikundi in the north, Zabul and Kandahar in the south, Helmand in the southwest and Ghazni in the east ([755]). It consists of the districts Dehrawud, Chora/Chinarto, Shahid-e Hassas and Khas Uruzgan. The capital is Tirinkot ([756]). For information on the district of Gizab, please see the section on Daikundi.

About 72 % of Uruzgan is mountainous while 21 % is flat ([757]). Although the main roads leading to and within Uruzgan are mostly unpaved, they can be accessed by car ([758]).

([752]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, September 2015.

([753]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, October 2015; UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, November 2015.

([754]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced displacements, Actual displacements between 1 January 2016 and 29 May 2016, 5 June 2016.

([755]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Brief introduction of Uruzgan province, n.d.; Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul (The), Context Analysis/URUZGAN Province, August 2006, p. 3.

([756]) UNOCHA, Uruzgan Province – Reference Map [map], 19 February 2014.

([757]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Brief introduction of Uruzgan province, n.d.

([758]) Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul (The), Context Analysis/URUZGAN Province, August 2006, p. 3.

Agriculture and animal husbandry are the key economic activities in the province, with opium poppy as a dominant crop ([759]). According to UNODC, opium poppy cultivation in Uruzgan increased by 22 % from 9,277 hectares in 2014 to 11,277 hectares in 2015. The districts of Tirinkot, Shahid-e Hassas and Dehrawud were the main opium poppy-cultivating districts in the province ([760]).

UN OCHA estimates the province's population for 2015 to be 386,818 ([761]). The majority is Pashtun with the dominant tribal confederation being the Durrani (70-75 %) and the Ghilzai comprising 15-20 % of the total population. The Hazara represent a minority (10 %) in the province and Kuchi nomads also live in Uruzgan ([762]).

In October 2015, President Ashraf Ghani appointed Haji Nazir Kharotai to replace Amanullah Taimori as governor of Uruzgan ([763]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Uruzgan

In 2015, several security operations were conducted by the ANSF in Uruzgan. During each operation, sources reported AGEs being arrested, killed and wounded; weapons were also seized ([764]). In August 2015, targeted killings claimed the lives of several prominent officials, including the head of the provincial council of Uruzgan ([765]).

Pashtuns and Hazaras lived in an 'uneasy co-existence' in Khas Uruzgan district, where most years have seen fighting around the district centre and security outposts. The district also provides access for the Taliban to the northern region of Helmand and Ghor through Gizab from Zabul and Ghazni provinces. After nearly non-stop fighting from mid-May to August 2015, the Taliban almost destroyed the ALP in the district while most of the other security forces were forced back into the district centre. As stated by AAN, the siege was 'not just part of a wider effort by the Taliban to put pressure on key districts'. It is more likely that this effort coincided with the local population's anger against the ALP commander and his men, whose behaviour, according to local sources, had become 'intolerable' ([766]).

As a result of Taliban's increased presence in Khas Uruzgan, Hazara communities were under greater pressure, according to AAN. In Palan area, Taliban ordered those who were working (or had worked) for either the international forces or the government to present themselves, so that the 'Emirate' could decide how to deal with them – they also had a detailed list of 116 names ([767]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Uruzgan Province counted 412 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([768]):

Violence targeting individuals	36
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	302
Explosions	55
Security enforcement	18
Non-conflict related incidents	1
Other incidents	0
Total security incidents	**412**

([759]) Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul (The), Context Analysis/URUZGAN Province, August 2006, p. 5.

([760]) UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015, Cultivation and Production, December 2015, p. 20.

([761]) UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([762]) Royal Netherlands Embassy in Kabul (The), Context Analysis/URUZGAN Province, August 2006, pp. 13, 20-22.

([763]) Pajhwok Afghan News, New Uruzgan governor vows improved security, 4 October 2015.

([764]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Khas Uruzgan road reopens after 3 months, 9 July 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Gigantic anti- rebels operation being launched in south, 9 July 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, 112 militants killed in a week in south, 1 July 2015; Tolo News, 62 Insurgents Killed in Afghan Operations, 17 June 2015; Tolo News, 110 Insurgents Killed in Afghan Military Operations, 11 June 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, 22 Taliban militants killed in Wardak, Uruzgan: MoI, 2 June 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, 130 insurgents eliminated in Uruzgan offensive, 22 May 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Over 80 insurgents, 11 army personnel killed: MoD, 30 March 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, 24 rebels dead in Uruzgan, Kandahar security operations, 15 February 2015.

([765]) Telegraph (The), Afghan forces recapture district which fell to Taliban after withdrawal of British troops, 30 August 2015.

([766]) Van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Khas Uruzgan: Insults, assaults, a siege and an airlift, 2 September 2015.

([767]) Van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Khas Uruzgan: Insults, assaults, a siege and an airlift, 2 September 2015.

([768]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Uruzgan Province ([769]):

Tirin Kot	122	Khas Uruzgan	57
Dihrawud	99	Chinartu	1
Chora	69	Shahidi Hassas	1
Char Chino	63		

In October 2015, Khaama Press called Uruzgan one of the relatively volatile provinces in which armed insurgent groups were actively operating and often carried out attacks ([770]). Taliban fighters were closing in on the headquarters of **Chinarto** and **Dehrawud** districts in September 2015 ([771]). The provincial police chief claimed in February 2016 that AGEs were carrying out targeted killings in cooperation with some government officials, including district police chiefs ([772]). The Long War Journal estimated in March 2016 that four districts of Uruzgan were heavily contested by the Taliban ([773]).

In **Chinarto** district, the Taliban attacked and overran several checkpoints in September and December 2015 ([774]). In January 2016, 10 security personnel, including the checkpoint commander, were killed as a result of an insider attack. A week earlier, another policeman had killed nine of his colleagues in a similar incident in Dehrawud district ([775]). In April 2016, the Taliban attacked security posts in Chinarto and Dehrawud districts but security forces were able to repel them ([776]).

In **Dehrawud** district dozens of policemen abandoned their posts and arrived in the capital of Uruzgan province in January 2016, after a dispute with the district police chief ([777]). According to tribal elders and residents, the Taliban controlled 95 % of the district in February 2016 ([778]). On 1 March 2016, about 100 policemen and soldiers were removed from checkpoints in the volatile Shahid-e Hassas district and redeployed to Dehrawud. According to the spokesman for the governor of Uruzgan province, Afghan forces want to create a reserve battalion in Dehrawud district and forces from other nearby districts also may be moved there ([779]). Security forces launched an operation in the district's Miand and Maktab areas in mid-March 2016, with both sides suffering casualties ([780]). The heavy fighting between the Taliban and Afghan security forces in Dehrawud district in March 2016 resulted in at least 73 civilian casualties (26 deaths and 47 injured), according to UNAMA ([781]).

A local official warned in May 2016 that Dehrawud may fall to the Taliban without emergency support from the government. The AGEs had entered the district centre and launched coordinated attacks, while the security forces were faced with a shortage of weapons and fuel and civilians were also suffering casualties. However, according to the governor's spokesman, there were enough security personnel to repel the attack ([782]).

In **Charchino** four security posts fell to the Taliban in September 2015 and the district police commander warned that the entire area could be captured by the AGEs, if reinforcements were not dispatched from Tirinkot ([783]). Intense clashes resulting in roadblocks and casualties on both sides occurred in the district in October 2015 and March 2016 ([784]). AGEs stormed the district centre from different directions in May 2016 but security forces managed to

([769]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([770]) Khaama Press, Taliban beheads religious cleric in Uruzgan province, 6 October 2015.

([771]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban closing in on 2 Uruzgan districts, 16 September 2015.

([772]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt officials complicit in target killings: Uruzgan police chief, 1 February 2016.

([773]) Roggio, B., Afghan forces withdraw from district in Uruzgan, 9 March 2016.

([774]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban closing in on 2 Uruzgan districts, 16 September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 rebels killed in clash with police in Uruzgan, 28 December 2015.

([775]) RFE/RL, Rogue Police Officer Kills 10 Afghan Comrades, 26 January 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 police killed by Taliban at Chinartu checkpoint in Uruzgan, 26 January 2016.

([776]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban pushed back from 2 towns: Uruzgan governor, 14 April 2016.

([777]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 60 police abandon 7 posts in Uruzgan's Dehrawud, 31 January 2016.

([778]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban control 95pc of Uruzgan's Dehrawud: elders, 4 February 2016.

([779]) RFE/RL, Afghan Security Forces Withdraw From District In Uruzgan Province, 1 March 2016.

([780]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 security men, 15 rebels killed in Uruzgan clash, 15 March 2016.

([781]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 37.

([782]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Deh Raud may fall if reinforcements don't arrive, official warns, 17 May 2016.

([783]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Insurgents overrun 4 security checkpoints in Uruzgan, 7 September 2015.

([784]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 38 police, 65 Taliban dead in Charchinu clashes, 14 October 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Casualties as clashes enter a second day in Uruzgan, 21 March 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, More than a dozen including police dead in Uruzgan clash, 26 March 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 insurgents, 7 police perish in ongoing Uruzgan firefight, 27 March 2016.

repel the attack. According to the governor's spokesman, 27 AGEs were killed and another 12 wounded ([785]). At least eight policemen defected to the Taliban in Charchino in May 2016, while at least another six policemen were reportedly killed in a suspected insider attack in the same month ([786]).

The district police chief of **Khas Uruzgan** was killed along with four other policemen when the district police headquarters was stormed by AGEs in September 2015 ([787]). AGEs executed a former administrative head for the district and shot three other persons, including a teacher in November 2015 ([788]). In March 2016, 65 policemen travelling from Khas Uruzgan to Tirinkot surrendered their weapons to Taliban fighters and joined them ([789]). In May 2016, operations were conducted in Chora and Khas Uruzgan districts where nine Taliban fighters were killed, including the group's shadow governor and military commission chief ([790]).

The Taliban killed the acting administrative head for **Surab** in September 2015 and the AGEs claimed they had seized control of several security checkpoints ([791]).

On 29 February 2016, the Taliban claimed the Khar Khordi area of Shahid-e Hassas had been 'completely liberated'. Security forces were removed from the district next day and redeployed to Dehrawud. Neither the Taliban nor government officials have yet stated that the entire district is under Taliban control ([792]).

A roadside bomb hit a vehicle carrying road workers in Marabad area on the outskirts of **Tirinkot**, the capital of Uruzgan province in September 2015 ([793]). Taliban fighters shot a 12-year-old boy on his way to school in the city in February 2016. The boy reportedly fought against the Taliban along with his uncle and other militia fighters ([794]). Unidentified gunmen shot the head of a village development council and his son in the Shah Zafar neighbourhood of Tirinkot in February 2016 ([795]).

Displacement

Uruzgan was not mentioned in relation to IDPs by UNHCR in September 2015 ([796]). Small scale displacements have been profiled in the province in October 2015, but no numbers were cited ([797]). In November 2015, UNHCR stated that 410 families were profiled as IDPs in Ghazni province and 30% of them originated from Maidan Wardak, Uruzgan, Kandahar, Zabul and Jawzjan provinces ([798]).

As a result of clashes between security forces and AGEs in Dehrawud district in March 2016, thousands of families from Londyana, Diwana, Warkh, Dezak, Osaki and other areas migrated to other parts of the province. According to the district chief, the main highway from Dehrawud to Tirinkot had been closed by Taliban fighters, although civilians could still travel on it ([799]).

According to UN OCHA, between 1 January 2016 and 29 May 2016, there were 13,961 individuals displaced to Uruzgan, 13,738 of them originating from the same province. Fifty four individuals from Chora, 401 from Khas Uruzgan and 546 from Dehrawud were displaced to Tirinkot, while Dehrawud hosted the largest number of IDPs in the province (11,702). A smaller number of IDPs was registered in Chora and Shahid-e Hassas as well ([800]).

([785]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Uruzgan clash leaves 27 militants dead, 16 May 2016.

([786]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 police defect to insurgents in Uruzgan, 7 May 2016; Khaama Press, 6 policemen killed in a suspected insider attack in Uruzgan, 21 May 2016.

([787]) Pajhwok Afghan News, District police chief among 4 wounded in Taliban attack, 17 September 2015.

([788]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Militants accused of hanging former district chief in Uruzgan, 28 November 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Teacher, son among 3 killed in Uruzgan, 29 November 2015.

([789]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 policemen disappear in Uruzgan, 11 March 2016.

([790]) Khaama Press, Taliban shadow governor and military commission chief killed in Uruzgan, 29 May 2016.

([791]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Sarab district's acting chief gunned down by Taliban, 9 September 2015.

([792]) Roggio, B., Afghan forces withdraw from district in Uruzgan, 9 March 2016.

([793]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 killed, 3 injured as bomb hits vehicle carrying labourers, 4 September 2015.

([794]) AFP, Assassinated at 12: rights groups condemn killing of Afghan militia boy, 4 February 2016.

([795]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Man gunned down along with son in Tirinkot, 26 February 2016.

([796]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, September 2015.

([797]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, October 2015, p. 2.

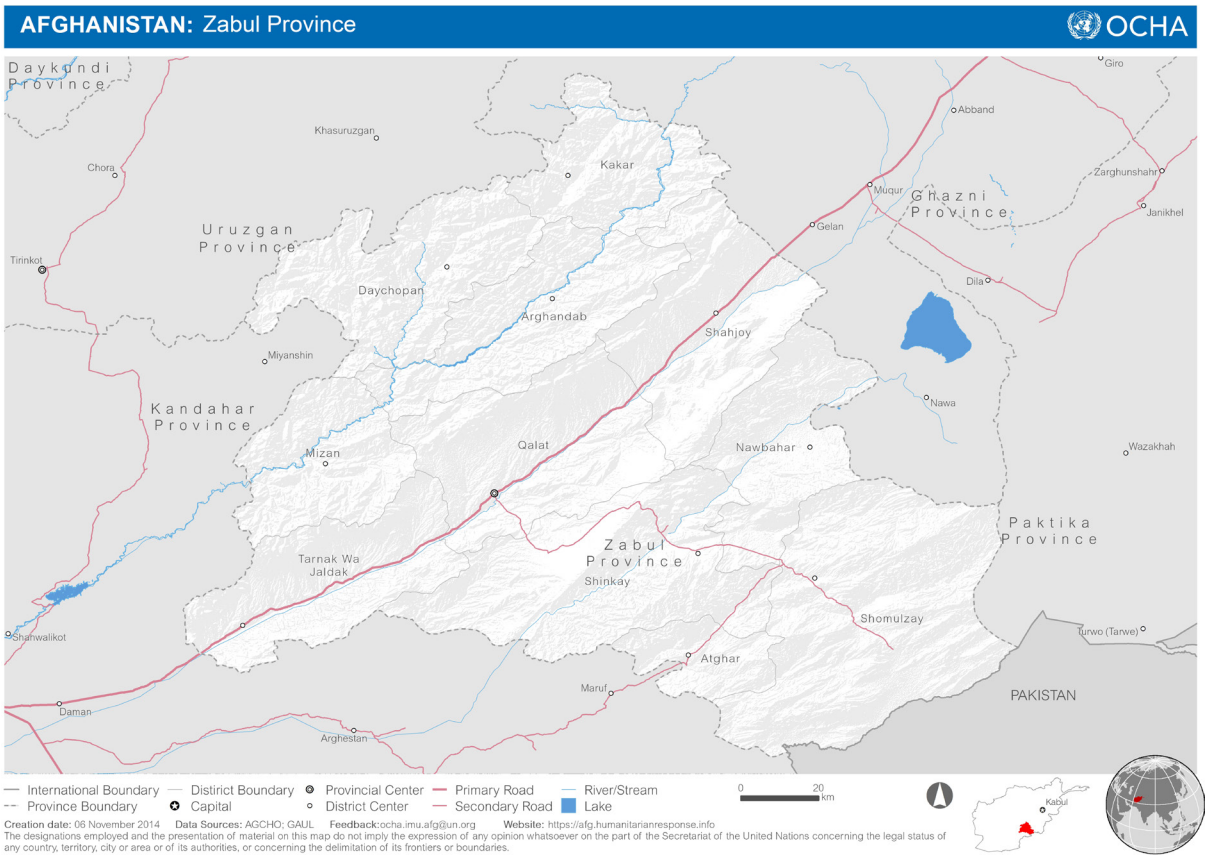
([798]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, November 2015, p. 4.

([799]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Thousands displaced as Uruzgan clashes continue, 24 March 2016.

([800]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced displacements, Actual displacements between 1 January 2016 and 29 May 2016, 5 June 2016.

2.3.5. Zabul

General description of the province



The province of Zabul, also known as Zabalistan, is located in southern Afghanistan, on the Kabul-Kandahar highway ([801]). Zabul is surrounded by Uruzgan Province in the north, Kandahar in the west and Ghazni and Paktika in the east, while it shares an international border with Pakistan in the south ([802]). The provincial capital is Qalat ([803]). The province is made up of the following districts: Atghar, Arghandab, Daychopan, Kakar (also known as Khak-e Afghan), Mizan, Nawbahar, Qalat, Shahjoy, Shinkay, Shomulzay and TarnakWaJaldak ([804]).

The people of Zabul are primarily associated with raising livestock and agriculture such as wheat and barley. Additionally, melon, watermelon, grapes, figs, almond and raspberries are mostly produced in the province ([805]). According to UNODC, opium poppy cultivation in Zabul saw a significant decrease of 78 % from 2,894 hectares in 2014 to 644 hectares in 2015. The districts of Tarnak Wa Jaldak, Kakar and Mizan were the main poppy-cultivating districts in the province, where security was poor ([806]).

UN OCHA estimated Zabul's population for 2015 at 304,126 ([807]). The majority is Pashtun with 40 % of the provincial population belonging to the Ghilzai tribe ([808]).

Bismillah Afghanmal was appointed governor of Zabul Province in March 2016 ([809]).

([801]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Zabul, n.d.

([802]) CFC, Afghanistan Resource Desk, Key information regarding Zabul province, November 2011, p. 1.

([803]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Zabul, n.d.

([804]) UNOCHA, Zabul Province – Reference Map[map], 19 February 2014; Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Zabul, n.d.

([805]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Zabul, n.d.

([806]) UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015, Cultivation and Production, December 2015, pp. 21-22.

([807]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([808]) CFC, Afghanistan Resource Desk, Key information regarding Zabul province, November 2011, p. 6.

([809]) Khaama Press, Afghanmal appointed Zabul's new governor, 14 March 2016.

Background on the conflict and actors in Zabul

According to Khaama Press, AGEs belonging to the Taliban as well as the Haqqani network have been active in the province ([810]). In August 2015, infighting between the loyalists of Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour and Mullah Mansour Dadullah occurred in Zabul. Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour was appointed as the leader of the Taliban after the death of Mullah Mohammad Omar was confirmed ([811]).

ANSF also reportedly encountered large numbers of 'foreign fighters' during an operation in the district of Daychopan in July 2015. A local tribal elder said that they were mostly Uzbek fighters who had fled from North Waziristan ([812]).

In 2015, AGEs abducted 30 Hazara passengers travelling from Herat to Kabul in Shahjoy district. Most hostages were released in exchange but three were executed and two others died, reportedly of natural causes ([813]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Zabul Province counted 219 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([814]):

Violence targeting individuals	14
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	118
Explosions	56
Security enforcement	27
Non-conflict related incidents	4
Other incidents	0
Total security incidents	**219**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Zabul Province ([815]):

Qalat	74	Atghar	7
Shah Joy	37	Shamulzayi	7
Arghandab	28	Daychopan	5
Mizan	19	Khak-e Afghan	5
Tarnak Wa Jaldak	17	Naw Bahar	5
Shinkay	14	Shahr-e Safa	1

According to Khaama Press, Zabul is among the relatively volatile provinces in southern Afghanistan where AGEs are operating in a number of districts ([816]).

Heavy fighting occurred in the province in November 2015 between the supporters of Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour and Mullah Mansour Dadullah ([817]). Differences between supporters of the two intensified in September 2015 after Dadullah refused to pledge allegiance to Mansour ([818]). In November 2015, Mullah Mohammad Rasool was appointed as head and Dadullah was named as deputy leader of Taliban's splinter group called 'High Council of Afghanistan Islamic Emirate' ([819]). In heavy clashes between the factions in **Arghandab**, **Khak-e Afghan** and **Daychopan** districts of Zabul province, Dadullah's splinter group was supported by Uzbek IS fighters ([820]). Mullah

([810]) Khaama Press, Taliban commander among 7 killed during clash with Afghan police in Zabul, 3 May 2016.

([811]) Khaama Press, Taliban infighting left five killed in Zabul, 30 August 2015.

([812]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan forces launch big anti-rebels offensive in Zabul, 11 July 2015.

([813]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 49.

([814]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([815]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([816]) Khaama Press, Taliban commander among 7 killed during clash with Afghan police in Zabul, 3 May 2016.

([817]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 110 killed as Taliban-IS clashes rage in Zabul, 9 November 2015.

([818]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Dadullah besieged in Zabul as Taliban cracks widen, 2 September 2015.

([819]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Mullah Rasool named leader of Taliban's splinter group, 2 November 2015.

([820]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 110 killed as Taliban-IS clashes rage in Zabul, 9 November 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Clashes between insurgent groups still underway in Zabul, 11 November 2015.

Mansour Dadullah died in the fighting in Khak-e Afghan on 12 November 2015 and the district has since become a stronghold of IS, demonstrating how 'reverberations within Taliban strongholds can produce opportunities for ISIS' ([821]). According to ISW, ISIS reportedly continued recruiting in Khak-e Afghan district in early April 2016 ([822]).

In **Khak-e Afghan** district unidentified gunmen kidnapped 14 members of a single family in October 2015, who were set free later in Ghazni Province after mediation of elders ([823]). Seven civilians were kidnapped from Gilan district in Ghazni Province and their dead bodies were recovered from Khak-e Afghan district in November 2015. According to officials, the victims belonged to the Hazara community and included four men, two women and a child. Taliban fighters reportedly hanged eight IS fighters for beheading the seven hostages, although NDS rejected these reports 'as baseless', stating that IS fighters had been killed during infighting after splitting into several groups ([824]).

Five policemen were killed at a security post in Kajarkhil area of **Shahjoy** district, while two other policemen disappeared in September 2015 ([825]). A soldier from the ANA, who had allegedly killed them, was arrested later ([826]). Unidentified gunmen kidnapped 20 civilians between Shahjoy and Qalat in November 2015, the second incident of mass abduction of the year. Most of the hostages were reportedly Hazara. Nine abducted passengers were released a day after the incident and, according to the Ministry of Interior, efforts were underway to release the rest ([827]). AGEs launched an attack on security posts in Shahjoy in December 2015, reportedly supported by fighters from Kandahar, but security forces suppressed the attack ([828]). In May 2016, four children were killed and one wounded as a result of a roadside explosion in the Tazi locality of the district ([829]).

The Taliban claimed responsibility for killing eight policemen in **Arghandab** in September 2015 ([830]). The district also witnessed heavy clashes between Taliban groups and residents of the area fled their homes because of the tense situation ([831]). Five security personnel were killed in a roadside bombing on the Arghandab-Qalat highway in March 2016 ([832]).

The Taliban blocked the Kabul-Kandahar highway near the capital of southern Zabul Province in October 2015. According to the governor's spokesman, the flow of traffic on the key highway was blocked in two areas – Spin Ghbargi and Kharijwe – on the outskirts of **Qalat**. The security forces later were able to reopen the highway in Spin Ghbargi area but clashes occurred in Khan and Norak villages ([833]). A landmine explosion killed two people in Seori Tapi area of Qalat and two children lost their lives in a roadside bomb blast in the provincial capital in March 2016 ([834]). Three civilians were killed when people gathered to play games near Tarang River on the outskirts of Qalat and were attacked by AGEs in April 2016 ([835]).

Displacement

UNHCR did not document any IDPs originating from or to Zabul in September-October 2015 ([836]). In November 2015, UNHCR stated that 410 families were profiled as IDPs in Ghazni Province and 30 % of them originated from Maidan Wardak, Uruzgan, Kandahar, Zabul and Jawzjan provinces ([837]). According to UN OCHA, between 1 January 2016 and 29 May 2016, there were 1,393 individuals displaced in Zabul, all of them originated from the same province. There were 140 individuals displaced in Kakar, 196 in Daychopan and 1,057 in Shahjoy ([838]).

([821]) ISW, Afghanistan Threat Assessment: The Taliban and ISIS, 11 December 2015, pp. 3-4; Tolo News, Khak-e-Afghan District A Daesh Stronghold: Security Sources, 12 November 2015.

([822]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016.

([823]) Khaama Press, Unidentified gunmen kidnap 14 civilians in Zabul, 27 October 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Abducted Zabul residents freed in Ghazni, 31 October 2015.

([824]) Khaama Press, Taliban hang 8 militants for beheading women and child in Zabul, 9 November 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban did not hang IS fighters over beheadings: NDS, 10 November 2015.

([825]) Khaama Press, Five policemen martyred in Zabul, 7 September 2015.

([826]) Khaama Press, Former soldier who allegedly martyred five comrades in Zabul arrested, 15 September 2015.

([827]) Khaama Press, Unidentified gunmen kidnap 20 civilians in Zabul, 21 November 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 abducted passengers released, rescue mission intensifies, 22 November 2015.

([828]) Khaama Press, Security forces rebuff attack of hundreds of Taliban in Zabul province, 24 December 2015.

([829]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Children dead in Zabul roadside explosion, 7 May 2016.

([830]) Khaama Press, Eight policemen martyred in their security post in Zabul, 19 September 2015.

([831]) Khaama Press, Internal clashes leave 40 fighters of Taliban, Daesh killed in Zabul, 8 November 2015.

([832]) Pajhwok Afghan News, At least 10 killed in Zabul, Herat incidents, 22 March 2016.

([833]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban block Kabul-Kandahar highway near Qalat, 15 October 2015.

([834]) Khaama Press, Two people killed, another wounded in landmine explosion in Zabul, 19 March 2016; Khaama Press, Bomb blast kills two school children in Zabul, 30 March 2016.

([835]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 civilians shot dead in Zabul, 16 April 2016.

([836]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, September 2015; UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, October 2015.

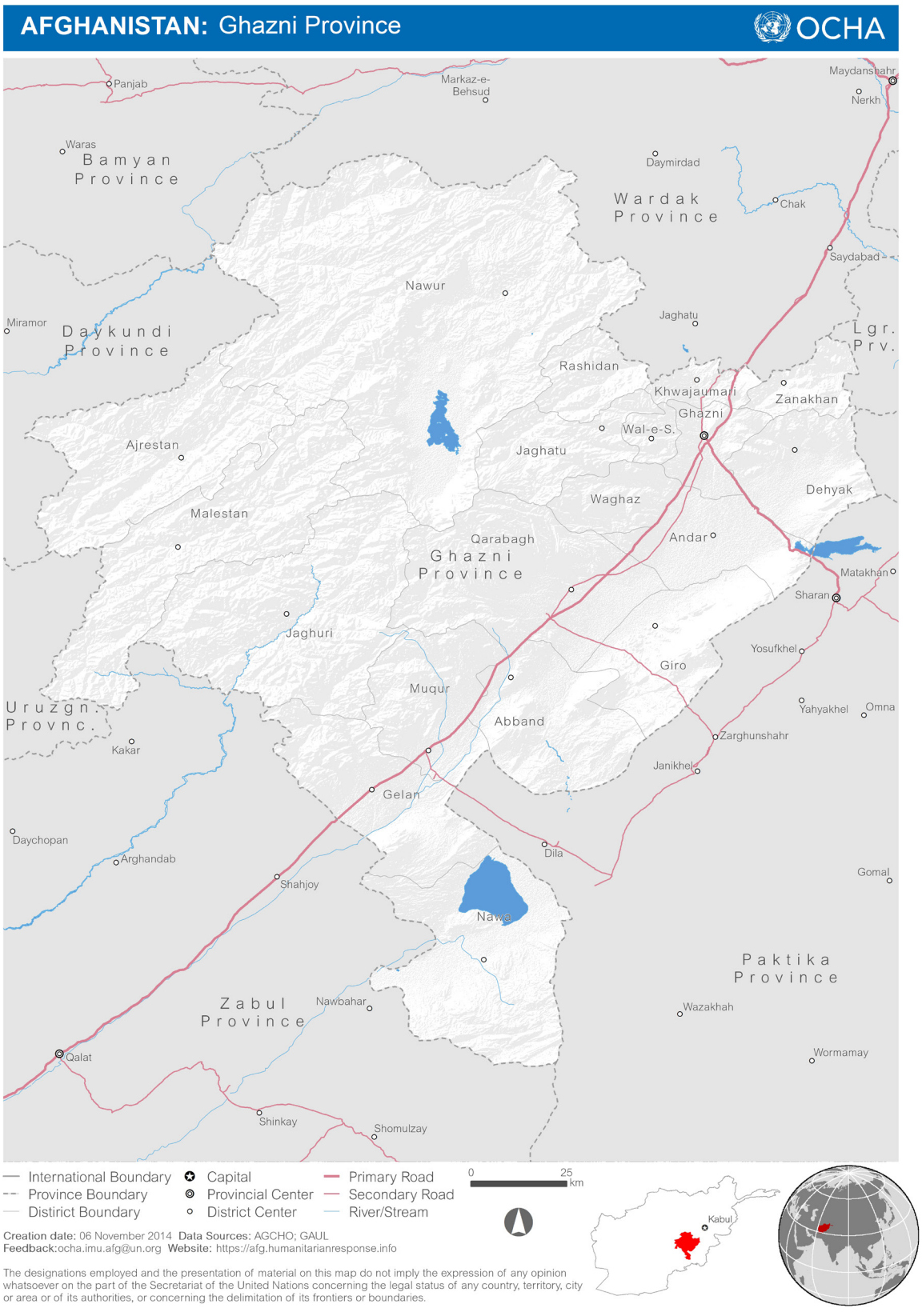
([837]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, November 2015 p. 4.

([838]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict induced displacements, Actual displacements between 1 January 2016 and 29 May 2016, 5 June 2016.

2.4. South-East

2.4.1. Ghazni

General description of the province



Ghazni Province is located in the southeast of the country. The province borders Wardak and Bamyan province to the north, Paktya, Paktika and Logar to the east, Zabul to the southwest and Uruzgan and Daykundi to the west. The provincial capital Ghazni City is located 145 kilometres from Kabul City on the Kabul-Kandahar highway ([839]).

The province consists of the following districts: Jaghuri, Malistan, Nawur, Ajrestan, Andar, Qarabagh, Giro, Muqur, Waghaz, Gelan, Abband, Nawa, Dehyak, Rashidan, Zanakhan, Khwajaumari, Jaghatu, Wali-Shahid (Khogyani) and Ghazni centre ([840]). Ghazni Province is estimated to have 1,228,831 inhabitants; the population of Ghazni City is 60,458 ([841]). The province consists of Pashtun (49 %) and Hazara (46 %), with a small Tajik population (5 %) ([842]). Some Kuchi nomads are also present in Ghazni ([843]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Ghazni

Security in the province of Ghazni is fragile and AGEs pose a major challenge ([844]).

The Taliban actively operated in several districts and proved capable of conducting coordinated attacks ([845]) and even collected taxes in Ghazni City for several years ([846]). In 2016, the Taliban shadow governor for Ghazni, Qari Yusuf, was arrested by NDS in Khost Province ([847]). According to the Afghanistan Analysts Network, Taliban networks in Ghazni enjoy direct support from the TTP ([848]).

In January 2015, about 200 IS-linked foreign fighters and their families settled in the southeast, including Ghazni Province ([849]). ISW reported that IS conducted its first attack in Ghazni Province, north of Ghazni City, in March 2016, and continued recruiting in the province ([850]), mainly in Andar, Gilan and Giro districts but IS movements have been reported in Nawa district as well ([851]).

The AGEs' main targets have been the ANSF ([852]), district governors ([853]), tribal leaders ([854]) and NGO workers ([855]) but civilians have also suffered heavy casualties ([856]). AGEs have blocked the main roads of the province several times, especially the strategically significant Kabul-Kandahar highway, in order to conduct attacks in different parts of the province ([857]). According to UNAMA, in 2015 and in the first half of 2016, Ghazni was one of the most IED-affected provinces ([858]). Kidnappings of Hazaras by AGEs were reported in several provinces, including Ghazni, in 2015 ([859]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Ghazni Province counted 1,292 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([860]):

([839]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Mineral Resources of Ghazni Province, 20 July 2014.

([840]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014.

([841]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([842]) CPAU, Conflict analysis: Jaghori and Malistan districts, Ghazni province, April 2009, p. 5.

([843]) CPAU, Conflict analysis: Jaghori and Malistan districts, Ghazni province, April 2009, p. 5.

([844]) BTI, BTI 2016 — Afghanistan Country Report, n.d.

([845]) US Department of Defence, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2015.

([846]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghazni traders, elders warned against donating money to Taliban, 4 July 2016.

([847]) Ariana News, Afghan intelligence arrests Taliban's shadow governor for Ghazni, 16 April 2016.

([848]) Obaid Ali, The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar's struggle against the Taleban, 15 December 2015.

([849]) Middle East Institute, Policy Focus 2016-11, The Islamic State in Afghanistan, Examining its Threat to Stability, May 2016.

([850]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016.

([851]) Pajhwok Afghan News, IS fighters flown to Ghazni by helicopters: HPC provincial head, 1 April 2016.

([852]) Pajhwok Afghan News, MPs want security bosses grilled over growing unrest, 12 September 2015.

([853]) Khaama Press, District Governor killed in Taliban ambush in Ghazni, 22 October 2015.

([854]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban can't reach goals by killing scholars: Ghani, 7 November 2015.

([855]) IRB, Afghanistan: Situation of Afghan citizens who work for NGOs or international aid organizations, and whether they are targeted by the Taliban; attacks against schools and incidents of violence against students, teachers, and the educational sector; state response (2012-January 2016), 22 February 2016.

([856]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Intense fighting displaces dozens of Qarabagh families, 2 September 2015.

([857]) Tolo News, Security Forces Thwart Taliban Attack on Ghazni, 12 October 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Commuters in trouble as Taliban roadblock continues, 14 October 2015.

([858]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 36; UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 48.

([859]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016. p. 49.

([860]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

Violence targeting individuals	39
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	952
Explosions	140
Security enforcement	155
Non-conflict related incidents	4
Other incidents	2
Total security incidents	**1,292**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Ghazni province ([861]):

Ghazni	321	Zanakhan	41
Andar	265	Khwajaumari	35
Giro	114	Abband	15
Qarabagh	113	Khogyani	3
Dehyak	95	Nawur	3
Gelan	74	Rashidan	3
Waghaz	69	Nawa	2
Muqur	54	Jaghuri	1
Jaghatu	42	Malistan	1
Ajrestan	41		

In January 2016, tribal elders stated that 'Andar, Giro, Maqur and some other districts are under direct threat from Taliban' ([862]). Nawa district had been under Taliban control for several years ([863]). In February 2016, many MPs expressed their concerns over increased security threats in the province ([864]). In March 2016, the Afghan Ministry of Interior confirmed that there was a high level of threat in Qarabagh, Wali-Shahid, Gelan, Muqur, Abband, Andar and Giro districts ([865]).

In May 2016, Pajhwok reported that 11 district chiefs of Ghazni stay in Ghazni City and perform their duties from the provincial capital due to security fears in their districts ([866]). Due to the deteriorated security situation there are no judicial officers in 13 districts of the province ([867]).

In June 2016, local residents stated that the security situation had worsened; a tribal leader emphasised that 'armed clashes between Taliban and the government have now become a daily occurrence in the districts' ([868]). In August 2016, several airstrikes and ground operations were conducted by ANSF in different areas in the province, leading to clashes with AGEs ([869]).

Several attacks have been conducted by AGEs in **Ghazni City**. In September 2015, the Taliban conducted a complex operation: it stormed a maximum security prison in the provincial capital and freed more than 400 prisoners, including about 150 Taliban fighters, and simultaneously attacked several security posts near the jail and in other parts of the city and in the districts. The Afghan government forces were uncoordinated and displayed confusion during the attacks ([870]). In November 2015, the deputy governor of the province admitted that the Taliban tried to storm Ghazni City ([871]). In November 2015, the Taliban killed a prominent religious cleric who had administered

([861]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([862]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghazni elders meet Abdullah, warn against Taliban advance, 10 January 2016.

([863]) Tolo News, MPs Concerned Over Security Situation in Ghazni, Helmand, 16 March 2016.

([864]) BAAG, Afghanistan in March 2016, n.d., p. 1.

([865]) Tolo News, Ghazni Districts Under Threat: MPs, 15 March 2016.

([866]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 district chiefs operate from Ghazni City, 25 May 2016.

([867]) Pajhwok Afghan News, No judicial officials in 13 Ghazni districts, 10 August 2016.

([868]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Security on the nosedive in most parts of Ghazni: Residents, 29 June 2016.

([869]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Security officials among 30 dead in Ghazni clashes, airstrikes, 20 August 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Security personnel among 13 killed in Ghazni clashes, 1 August 2016.

([870]) AAN, Ghazni Jailbreak: Where the government failed and its enemy succeeded, 15 January 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 policemen among 8 killed in Taliban attack on jail, 14 September 2015; RFE/RL, Taliban Storm Afghan Prison, Free Inmates, 14 September 2015; Tolo News, MOI Assigns Team To Probe Ghazni Prison Break, 14 September 2015.

([871]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Fearing Taliban attacks, residents stop visiting Ghazni City, 3 November 2015.

a religious school in Ghazni City and had religious radio programmes ([872]). In April 2016, a tribal elder died and two of his relatives were injured during a VBIED attack ([873]). According to local officials 80 AGEs were killed in a military operation in the province; the provincial police chief stated that 'large areas of Ghazni City and districts had been recaptured from the militants' in May 2016 ([874]). In May 2016, three policemen were killed in an insider attack in Deh Khudaidad area of the city; the attack was confirmed by the Taliban ([875]). In the same month, one child died and three others were injured when a mortar shell exploded in Kalajoz area of the city ([876]). At the end of May 2016, AGEs attacked an ALP vehicle, killing four civilians by IED ([877]). In June 2016, at least nine people (including the attackers) died and 13 other were injured when four suicide bombers attacked the provincial court in the city; the Taliban claimed responsibility for the accident ([878]), saying that it was 'in retaliation for the execution of six Taliban-linked inmates in early May' ([879]). In July 2016, Taliban fighters torched the MTN mobile-phone tower in Qadam Qala area near Ghazni City ([880]).

In **Dehyak district** the Taliban has a strong presence ([881]); clashes between the AGEs and the ANSF are common. Taliban fighters consistently block the roads, plant roadside bombs ([882]) and attack police posts. In September 2015, at least six civilians died when a roadside bomb exploded ([883]); then at least 20 AGEs and three ALP members were killed in clashes when about 300 AGEs stormed police posts in the district ([884]). At the end of September 2015, Taliban distributed night letters and warned local residents to leave the district in order to avoid clashes between them and the ALP forces ([885]). In November 2015, two civilians were killed in a roadside bomb explosion ([886]). In January 2016, three civilians lost their lives during clashes between the AGEs and the Afghan security forces ([887]). In February 2016, Taliban fighters killed two policemen ([888]). In June 2016, two policemen and three AGEs died in Laghabad area of the district when AGEs attacked security posts ([889]). In July 2016, four children died and two others were injured when a roadside bomb exploded in Bashir Qala area of the district ([890]).

Andar district is another hotspot in the province. Taliban fighters regularly storm security posts ([891]), attack ANA soldiers ([892]) and kidnap civilians ([893]) in the district. However, in November 2015, Andar residents also accused ANA soldiers ([894]) and ALP personnel ([895]) of killing innocent civilians and kidnapping women for ransom ([896]). In February 2016, dozens of people demonstrated in Ghazni City against Andar ALP members because they harassed Andar residents ([897]). In March 2016, the Andar district chief told Pajhwok that recently a large number of Taliban fighters had assembled and launched efforts to take control of the town in Andar ([898]). In April 2016, 16 Taliban fighters, including Mullah Qadar and Mullah Yousaf, were killed in two separate incidents ([899]).

([872]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban can't reach goals by killing scholars: Ghani, 7 November 2015.

([873]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 insurgents, a tribal elder killed in Ghazni, 27 April 2016.

([874]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 80 insurgents killed, wounded in Ghazni operation: Governor, 24 April 2016.

([875]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 policemen killed in insider attack in Ghazni, 7 May 2016.

([876]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 child killed, 3 wounded in Ghazni mortar blasts, 23 May 2016.

([877]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 48.

([878]) Xinhuanet, Death toll of suicide attack in Afghan eastern Ghazni soars to 9, with 13 injured, 1 June 2016; Khaama Press, Ghazni Appellate Court Chief wounded in Taliban attack, 1 June 2016.

([879]) Dawn, Six killed as Taliban attack Ghazni courthouse, 2 June 2016.

([880]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban torch telecom tower, abduct guard in Ghazni, 20 July 2016.

([881]) Khaama Press, Bomb blast kills two brothers in Ghazni, 18 November 2015.

([882]) Pajhwok Afghan News, In Ghazni, Taliban-planted roadside bombs fuel concerns, 23 September 2015.

([883]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 civilians dead, 3 injured in Ghazni roadside bombing, 1 September 2015.

([884]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 ALP personnel among 23 killed in Deh Yak battle, 8 September 2015.

([885]) Khaama Press, Taliban warn villagers in Ghazni to empty their homes, 20 September 2015.

([886]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghazni roadside bombing claims lives of 2 brothers, 18 November 2015.

([887]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians among 8 killed in Paktika, Ghazni incidents, 2 January 2016.

([888]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Nearly a dozen killed in separate Ghazni clashes, 14 February 2016.

([889]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 insurgents, 2 policemen dead in Ghazni firefights, 2 June 2016.

([890]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 children killed, 2 injured in Ghazni landmine blast, 5 July 2016.

([891]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Ander clash leaves 9 dead, 6 wounded, 1 September 2015.

([892]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 civilians, soldier dead as Taliban open fire at car, 15 September 2015.

([893]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kidnapped passengers rescued in Ghazni, 20 September 2015; Khaama Press, Taliban release most of Ghazni hostages, 20 September 2015.

([894]) Pajhwok Afghan News, ANA soldiers accused of killing civilian in Ghazni, 1 November 2015.

([895]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Local police mercilessly kill civilian in Ghazni, 16 November 2015.

([896]) Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP forces kidnap Andar women for ransom, 17 November 2015.

([897]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Protest held against ALP, uprising members in Ghazni, 20 February 2016.

([898]) Pajhwok Afhan News, Andar could fall to Taliban, fear officials and residents, 19 March 2016.

([899]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 16 Taliban militants killed in Ghazni's Andar incidents, 20 April 2016.

Other parts of the province, especially **Muqur** and **Qarabagh districts**, are also insecure and have experienced heavy clashes ([900]).

In November 2015, Uzbek members of the IS abducted Hazara people from **Jaghuri district**, Ghazni and killed them in Zabul Province ([901]).

In June 2016, the Taliban shadow governor for Ghazni and three other AGEs were killed in an airstrike in **Abband district**; according to local residents two civilians were also injured ([902]).

In June 2016, at least 14 Taliban fighters were killed in **Gilan district** in two separate incidents; the police also suffered casualties ([903]). In August 2016, six members of a family, including 2 children, were killed by a roadside bomb in Gilan ([904]).

In May 2016, due to military operations, 30 villages were cleared of AGEs in **Khogyani district** ([905]). At the end of May 2016, two women died in the district when ANA mortar targeting Taliban positions hit their house ([906]).

Displacement

In 2015, more than 5,000 new conflict-induced displaced individuals were recorded in the province ([907]). In September 2015, dozens of Qarabagh families – primarily from Pirogai, Shadi Khan Kala, Nasratabad, Akhtaro Chamber, Saifuddin Chamber and Wazir Kala areas – moved to Ghazni City due to the ongoing clashes between the Taliban and security forces ([908]).

Between January and May 2016, 1,483 persons were displaced to Ghazni district, most of them from Qarabagh (340 persons), Andar (168 persons) and Jaghatu (143 persons) districts ([909]).

([900]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 district chiefs operate from Ghazni City, 25 May 2016; Khaama Press, Deadly clashes erupting between rival Taliban groups in Ghazni, 16 February 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Martyred ALP personnel from Khonyan: United in life and death, 27 February 2016.

([901]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 110 killed as Taliban-IS clashes rage in Zabul, 9 November 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Abdullah vows to punish killers, rules out compromise, 12 November 2015.

([902]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's shadow governor for Ghazni killed in airstrike, 18 June 2016.

([903]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 insurgents, 2 policemen dead in Ghazni firefights, 2 June 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 commanders among 8 Taliban killed in Ghazni clash, 11 June 2016.

([904]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 of a family among 10 dead in Ghazni, Farah bombings, 8 August 2016.

([905]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 villages cleared of insurgents in Ghazni: officials, 30 May 2016.

([906]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 73.

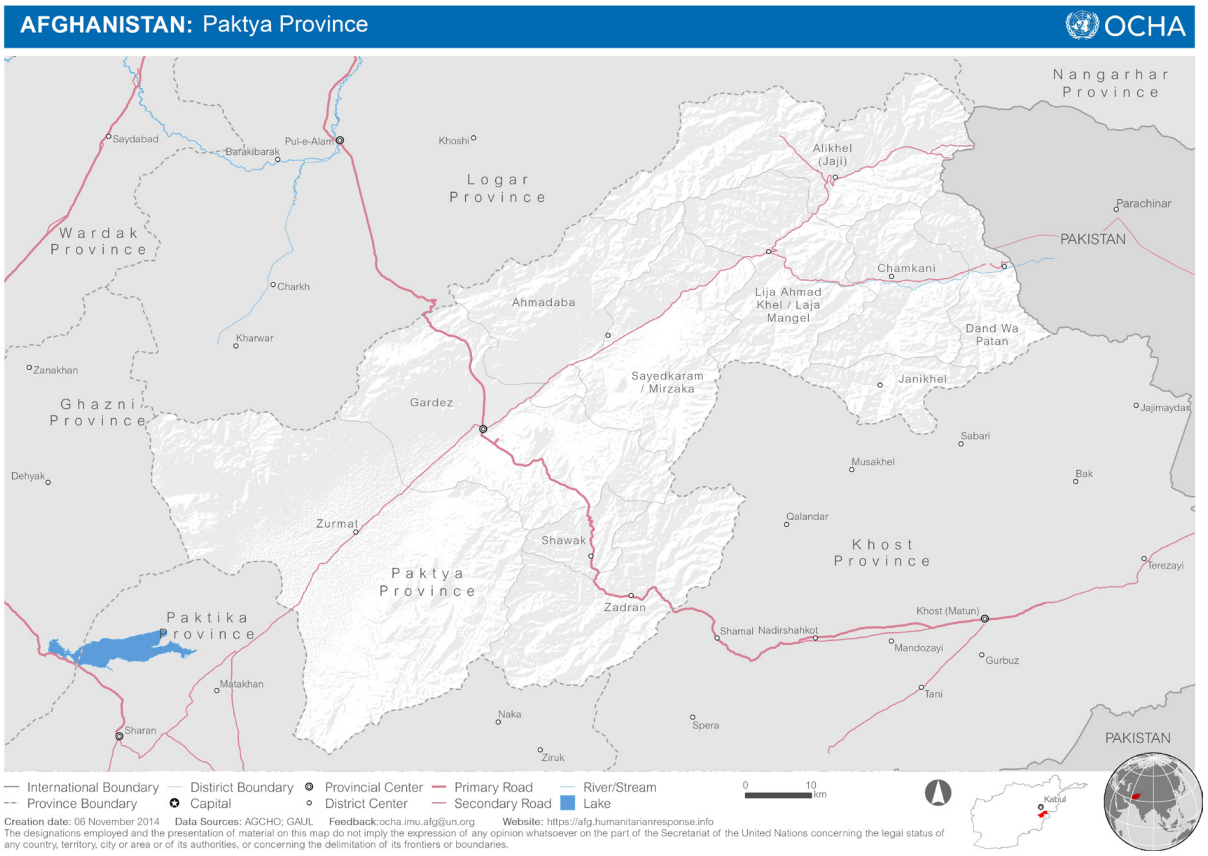
([907]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-induced Internal Displacement 2015: The Year In Review, April 2016.

([908]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Intense fighting displaces dozens of Qarabagh families, 2 September 2015.

([909]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Conflict-induced Displacements, Snapshot, 1 January - 31 May 2016, 12 June 2016.

2.4.2. Paktya

General description of the province



Paktya province is located in the southeast of the country. It borders Logar Province to the north, Ghazni to the west, Paktika to the south, Khost to the southeast and Pakistan to the east. Paktya is 115 kilometres from Kabul and consists of 11 districts: Ahmadaba, Alikhel/Jaji, Chamkani, Dand Wa Patan, Gardez, Lija Ahmad Khel/Laja Mangel, Janikhel, Sayedkaram/Mirzaka, Shawak, Zadran and Zurmat ([910]). The province is estimated to have 551,987 inhabitants; the population of the provincial capital, Gardez, is 24,803 ([911]). Paktya is predominantly Pashtun, with a small Tajik population. Some Kuchi nomads are also present in the province. About two-thirds of the province is mountainous or semi-mountainous, so it is prone to natural disasters such as floods, landslides and avalanches ([912]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Paktya

The most problematic district of the province has been Zurmat for several years. The district connects Paktya to three provinces (Paktika, Ghazni and Logar), making it a crossroads for Taliban fighters ([913]). In the 2000s, Zurmat was labelled a Taliban stronghold and sometimes called “Little Kandahar” since many Taliban leaders were born there. Violence gradually eased after the withdrawal of international forces; however, the relatively calm situation seems to stem from the relations between the Taliban and local residents, who usually settle their disputes through the Taliban ([914]). According to Thomas Ruttig, ‘most of the Taleban fighters who fight in Zurmat belong to both the Haqqani network as well as Abdul Latif Mansur’s, nephew of Nasrullah Mansur, the leader of a splintered faction of Harakat-e Nawin-e Inqilab-e Islami (New Islamic Revolution Moment)’ ([915]). He stated that ‘Mansur’s fighters are

([910]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014.

([911]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([912]) ACF, Semi-Quantitative Evaluation of Access and Coverage, n.d., p. 10.

([913]) Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015.

([914]) AAN, Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan’s most notorious hotspots, 9 July 2015.

([915]) Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015.

in the majority in the district, while Haqqani fighters are smaller in number' ([916]). However, the Haqqani network, which is considered to be the most cohesive and best-funded insurgent group in the region, has had strongholds in Paktya for years ([917]).

According to Afghan officials, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence is involved in ground battles in Chamkani district ([918]) and Pakistani Taliban fighters are present in the province ([919]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Paktya province counted 394 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([920]):

Violence targeting individuals	19
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	235
Explosions	54
Security enforcement	82
Non-conflict related incidents	3
Other incidents	1
Total security incidents	**394**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Paktya province ([921]):

Gardez	119	Ahmadaba	20
Zurmat	104	Chamkani	19
Jaji	41	Lija Ahmad Khel	16
Dand Wa Patan	39	Jani Khel	11
Sayedkaram	24	Shawak	1

In August 2016, the Taliban reportedly seized **Jani Khel** district after heavy clashes with ANSF ([922]). In reaction, it was reported that drone attacks were conducted against the Taliban positions ([923]).

In **Zurmat district** ongoing clashes between the Afghan security forces and the Taliban killed at least nine civilians in September 2015 ([924]). In January 2016, the ANA, the ANP, the ALP and the ANCOP jointly carried out a 10-day operation called Khyber in the Sahak area of the district, which is mainly inhabited by the Sahak tribe and has long been almost fully under Taliban control ([925]). Both the Afghan government and the Taliban endangered the lives of local residents: the Taliban launched its attacks from areas close to the locals' houses; the ANSF shelled villages suspected to be Taliban hideouts and used schools and civilians' houses for military purposes [926]. Moreover, the ANA stayed in a health clinic for three nights ([927]). At the end of the operation, which resulted in civilian casualties, both parties claimed victory ([928]).

Dand Wa Patan district has also experienced heavy clashes between the ANSF and the Taliban. In September 2015, the Taliban attacked border police posts; about 70 AGEs and at least six border police officers died during the clashes ([929]). According to a border zone commander, 1,000 Pakistani militiamen backed Taliban fighters in the

([916]) Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015.

([917]) Reuters, Taliban's Haqqani may be even more deadly foe than Mansour, 22 May 2016.

([918]) Tolo News, Pakistan's ISI and military supporting insurgents in Paktia: Officials, 15 July 2015.

([919]) Tolo News, 37 insurgents killed in ANSF operations, 28 May 2015.

([920]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([921]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([922]) Khaama Press, Taliban militants capture Jani Khel district in of Paktia, 27 August 2016.

([923]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Drone strikes kill 120 militants in Paktia, 29 August 2016.

([924]) Pajhwok Afghan News, At least 9 civilians lose lives to ongoing clashes in Paktia, 16 September 2015.

([925]) AAN, The ANSF's Zurmat Operation: Abuses against local civilians, 4 March 2016.

([926]) AAN, The ANSF's Zurmat Operation: Abuses against local civilians, 4 March 2016.

([927]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 25.

([928]) AAN, The ANSF's Zurmat Operation: Abuses against local civilians, 4 March 2016.

([929]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Clashes on, rebels capture border police posts in Paktia, 7 September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 border policemen killed in ongoing Paktia clash, 8 September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Pakistan border guards constructing facilities in Paktia, 10 September 2015.

district ([930]). In November 2015, hundreds of Taliban fighters attacked border security posts again in the district, killing at least two border policemen ([931]). In March 2016, Pakistani forces entered many kilometres inside the district and built military facilities there, according to local residents ([932]). A border police commander claimed in March 2016 that Pakistani security forces fired rockets into the district in retaliation for a Taliban attack ([933]).

In October 2015, in **Ahmad Khel district**, Taliban fighters blocked the Gardez-Dand Wa Patan highway, which connects six districts with Gardez, in order to carry out attacks ([934]).

A number of security incidents have been reported from **Sayedkaram district**. In October 2015, a US F-16 fighter jet was hit by small-arms fire but the pilot returned the plane safely back to Bagram Airfield ([935]). At the end of October 2015, four policemen were killed when a roadside bomb exploded ([936]). In November 2015, Taliban fighters abducted civilians in the district; according to a Taliban source, ALP officers were kidnapped ([937]). In May 2016, four policemen died when a checkpost was attacked ([938]).

In **Zadran** and **Shawak districts** students did not complete their courses due to the ongoing security problems and shortage of teachers ([939]).

In August 2016, foreign forces conducted airstrikes against AGEs in **Chamkani** district ([940]).

ANSF conducted several counterinsurgency operations in the province. For example, in September 2015, 32 AGEs died in an ANA operation ([941]). In November 2015, NDS detained three prominent members of the Haqqani network in **Gardez City** ([942]). In May 2016, 14 AGEs were killed in two airstrikes ([943]).

Several demonstrations have been staged in the province. In September 2015, hundreds of people protested in **Gardez City** demanding the words "Afghan" and "Islam" be mentioned in the electronic national IDs ([944]) and 300 demonstrators blocked the Kabul-Gardez highway for two days asking the government to pay more attention to the province in terms of reconstruction and security ([945]). In November 2015, doctors went on strike because they had not been paid for five months ([946]). In April 2016, protestors accused the provincial council and their representatives in the Wolesi Jirga of corruption ([947]). In the same month, hundreds of people protested against the assassination of a tribal elder, who was attacked two days before ([948]).

Displacement

In September, October and November 2015, small-scale displacements were profiled in Paktya ([949]). In 2015 more than 5,000 new conflict-induced displaced individuals were recorded in the province ([950]). Between January and May

([930]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Pakistan border guards constructing facilities in Paktia, 10 September 2015.

([931]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 police wounded as Taliban torch security post in Paktia, 1 November 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Fierce fighting in Dand-i-Patan enters second day, 2 November 2015.

([932]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Pakistani forces enter 'several kilometers' inside Paktia, 17 March 2016.

([933]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Pakistani forces fire rockets into Dand-i-Patan district, 28 March 2016.

([934]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban block Gardez-Dand Patan highway in Paktia, 30 October 2015.

([935]) Khaama Press, US F-16 fighter jet struck by Taliban militants in Paktia province, 19 October 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Pentagon confirms F-16 hit by small-arms fire in Paktia, 20 October 2015.

([936]) Khaama Press, Landmine explosion martyrs four policemen in Paktia, 29 October 2015.

([937]) Pajhwok Afghan News, A dozen civilians taken hostage by Taliban in Paktia: Official, 11 November 2015.

([938]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 policemen dead, 2 wounded in Paktia check-post attack, 4 May 2016.

([939]) Pajhwok Afghan News, In remote Paktia districts, school education in a shambles, 29 February 2016.

([940]) Pajhwok Afghan News, A dozen Taliban killed in Paktika, Paktia airstrikes, 15 August 2016.

([941]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 militants eliminated in Paktia airstrikes, ANA claims, 3 September 2015.

([942]) Khaama Press, NDS detains bomb supplier of Haqqani network in Paktia, 22 November 2015.

([943]) Khaama Press, 14 militants killed in separate airstrikes in Paktia province, 31 May 2016.

([944]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Hundreds rally in Paktia over e-ID cards issue, 2 September 2015.

([945]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Protestors accuse central govt of neglecting Paktia, 9 September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul-Gardez highway reopens after 2 days of protests, 12 September 2015.

([946]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Striking Paktia doctors vow to continue strike, 10 November 2015.

([947]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Protesters accuse Paktia lawmakers of corruption, 11 April 2016.

([948]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Hundreds rally in Paktia over elder's assassination, 25 April 2016.

([949]) UNHCR, Afghanistan, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, September 2015; UNHCR, Afghanistan, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, October 2015; UNHCR, Afghanistan, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, November 2015.

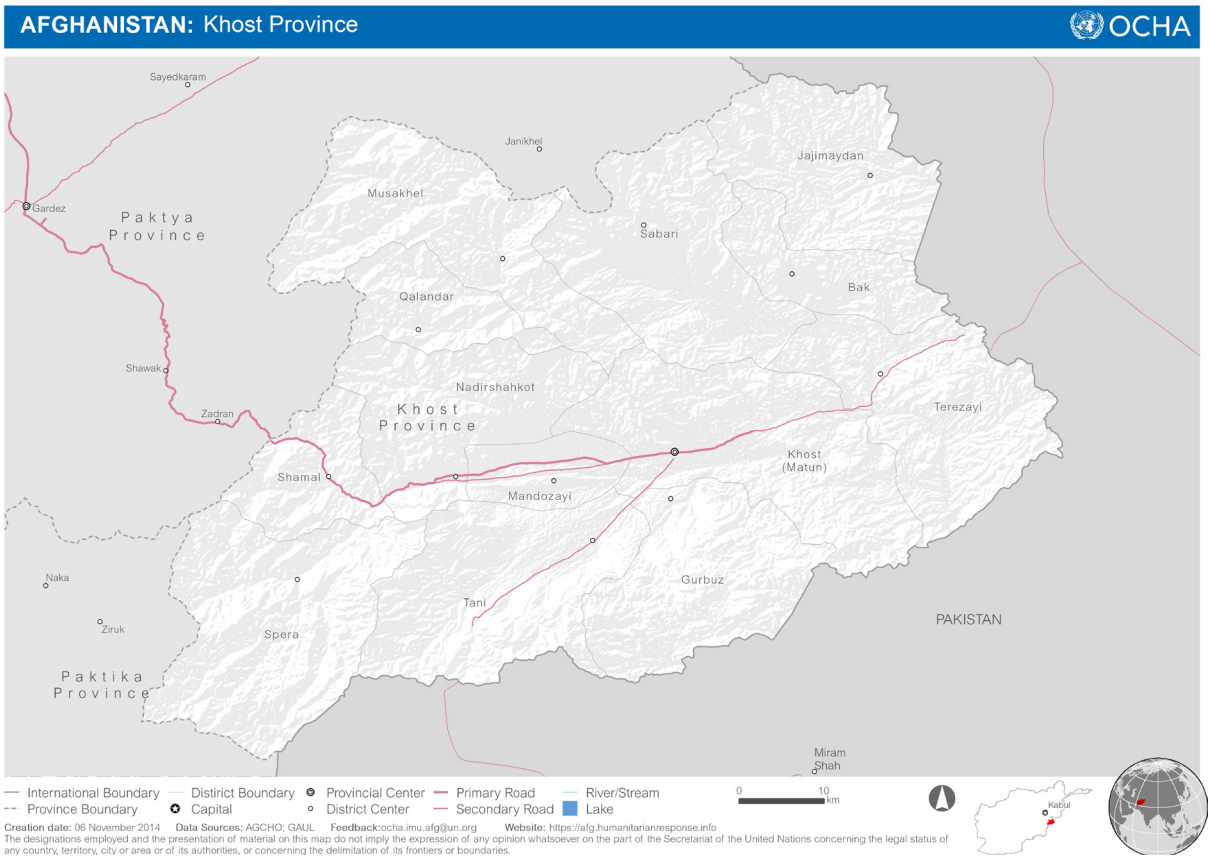
([950]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-induced Internal Displacement 2015: The Year In Review, April 2016.

2016, 38 individuals were displaced from Pul-e Khumri to Gardez district; while in Chamkani district 85 were newly displaced persons; in Dand Wa Patan district 370 newly displaced persons were recorded. From Lija Ahmad Khel/ Laja Mangel district 77 individuals were displaced to Mohammadagha district, Logar ([951]).

UNHCR closed its offices in Paktya at the end of December 2015 ([952]).

2.4.3. Khost

General description of the province



Khost province is located in the southeast of Afghanistan and was formed from parts of Paktya and Paktika in 1995 ([953]). The province has a 185-kilometre border with the tribal areas of North Waziristan and Kurram Agency in Pakistan. This long and porous border makes the province of great strategic importance as many AGEs have found a safe haven across the border in Pakistan ([954]).

The province is made up of the following districts: Bak, Gurbuz, Jajimaydan, Khost (Matun), Mandozayi, Musakhel, Nadirshahkot, Qalandar, Sabari, Shamal, Spera, Tani, Terezayi ([955]). Khost City, locally also known as Matun, is the capital of the province. The province has an estimated 574,582 inhabitants ([956]). The large majority of the population belongs to the Pashtun ethnic group; prominent tribes are the Zadran, Mangal, Tani, Gurbuzi, Babakar Khel, Jaji,

([951]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Conflict-induced Displacements, Snapshot, 1 January - 31 May 2016, 12 June 2016.

([952]) Pajhwok Afghan News, UNHCR closes office in southeastern Afghanistan, 31 December 2015.

([953]) Tribal Analysis Center, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013. p. 3.

([954]) EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan Security Situation, January 2016. p. 97.

([955]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Khost Province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014.

([956]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

Sabari, Terezayi, Mandozayi, Moqbil and Ismael Khel ([957]). With the exception of the tribally heterogeneous Terezayi district, Khost districts are quite homogenous in terms of tribal composition. In Khost City small populations of Tajiks and Hazaras also live alongside Pashtuns ([958]). A sizeable population of Kuchi nomads is present in the province ([959]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Khost

Khost governor stated that a number of counterinsurgency operations had been conducted jointly by ANA and NDS in the province ([960]). According to UNAMA, the number of civilian casualties resulting from combined operations of IMF and ANSF increased in the second half of 2015 in Khost Province ([961]). The ALP programme is not present in the province ([962]). According to UNAMA, in the first half of 2016, the paramilitary pro-Government armed group, the Khost Protection Force, which is not regularised into ANSF, was involved in several incidents that resulted in civilian casualties, mainly in Sabari district ([963]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Khost Province counted 441 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([964]):

Violence targeting individuals	9
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	142
Explosions	91
Security enforcement	196
Non-conflict related incidents	3
Total security incidents	**441**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Khost province ([965]):

Khost (Matun)	91	Mandozayi	20
Terezayi	73	Spera	19
Nadirshahkot	47	Qalandar	14
Musakhel	42	Tani	12
Sabari	40	Shamal	4
Bak	33	Bak	1
Jajimaydan	21	Sabari	1
Gurbuz	21		

According to RFE/RL, Khost was relatively calm in the second half of 2015 ([966]). In October 2015, a Khost provincial council member stated that: 'Khost was one of the peaceful provinces of the country due to the preparedness of security forces and all-out cooperation from residents' '[967]). Khost police chief, brigadier general Faziullah Ghairat, stated in November 2015 that AGEs may be present in border areas but rejected claims that IS carried out activities in the province ([968]).

AGEs' attacks mainly targeted the ANP, government officials and tribal leaders in Khost province. In September 2015, Taliban fighters attacked a police checkpoint in **Bak district** but were repelled by security forces ([969]). In October 2015, six tribal leaders were injured in a roadside bomb attack in **Mandozayi district** ([970]). In December 2015, two

([957]) Tribal Analysis Center, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013. p. 8.

([958]) Tribal Analysis Center, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, p. 5.

([959]) The Liaison Office, Major Land Disputes and Land Titling Systems of Khost Province, October 2014, p. 16.

([960]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost governor, PC head extol security forces' performance, 16 February 2016.

([961]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Annual Report 2015, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 63.

([962]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 89.

([963]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, pp. 25, 88.

([964]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([965]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([966]) RFE/RL, Afghan Students Killed in School Attack, 11 January 2016.

([967]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Ramp up cooperation with security forces, Khostis urged, 7 October 2015.

([968]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost, Paktia join hands against security threats, 28 November 2015.

([969]) Pajhwok Afghan News, A dozen insurgents perish in Khost firefight: Police, 12 September 2015.

([970]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 tribal elders wounded in Khost roadside bombing, 14 October 2015.

policemen were wounded in an explosion on the outskirts of **Khost City** ([971]). In January 2016, Taliban fighters attacked a security checkpoint in **Sabari district**, killing 11 civilians ([972]). In January 2016, AGEs' rockets detonated near a school in **Bak** district, killing a boy and injuring 10 other children and a woman ([973]). In February 2016, AGEs attacked and injured the public health director of Khost in **Khost City** ([974]) and a senior NDS official died in an explosion ([975]). In April 2016, a district court registrar was shot dead in **Mandozayi district** ([976]). In May 2016, the border police chief was killed in a bomb attack ([977]).

Afghan security forces launched several operations against AGEs in the province. In October 2015, a top commander of the Haqqani network was detained, who moved from Pakistan to Khost Province with 100 fighters to conduct attacks in **Khost City** ([978]). In April 2016, the NDS discovered two weapon caches of the Haqqani network in **Terezayi district** ([979]). In January 2016, nearly 200 local and foreign AGEs were killed in the Operation Khyber launched by the Afghan security forces in Khost, Paktya, Paktika and Ghazni provinces ([980]). In February 2016, the ANA killed more than 10 AGEs and seized weapons and ammunition during an operation in **Sabari district** of Khost ([981]).

During Afghan Special Forces' operations several civilians were killed in **Gurbuz district** in September 2015 ([982]), in **Terezayi district** in November 2015 ([983]) and also in **Khost City** in April 2016 ([984]). In April 2016, Khost Protection Force killed three civilians during a search operation in **Sabari district** in an exchange of fire; and in June 2016, Khost Protection Force also killed three civilians believed to be AGEs during another search operation in **Sabari district** ([985]). In August 2016, Afghan Special Forces killed two children and wounded 15 other civilians, including women in a night raid against AGEs in **Spera** district ([986]). Also in August, the ANA launched a large-scale military operation against the Taliban in Musakhel district ([987]).

NDS rescued several abducted children in March and May 2016 and arrested the kidnappers ([988]).

Demonstrations have been staged in the province: in September 2015, hundreds of people protested demanding the words "Afghan" and "Islam" be mentioned in the electronic national IDs ([989]) and teachers protested because they were denied land ([990]). The striking teachers closed 71 schools in Tanai and Gurbuz districts ([991]); as a consequence of the strikes, 275 teachers were given land plots in those districts in November 2015 ([992]). In May 2016, thousands of citizens protested against routing the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TUTAP) project through Bamyan ([993]).

([971]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Policemen among 3 wounded in Khost explosion, 10 December 2015.

([972]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban-fired mortar shells leaves child dead, 10 wounded in Khost, 11 January 2016.

([973]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 53.

([974]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost public health director wounded in shooting, 10 February 2016.

([975]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Senior NDS official dead in Khost explosion, 19 February 2016.

([976]) Pajhwok Afghan News, District court registrar gunned down by motorcyclists in Khost, 24 April 2016.

([977]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost border police chief killed, 5 injured in bomb attack, 24 May 2016.

([978]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Key Haqqani commander detained in Khost, 5 October 2015.

([979]) Ariana News, Afghan intelligence thwarted Haqqani Network plots in Kabul, Khost, 13 April 2016.

([980]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Some 200 militants killed in southeast offensive', 5 January 2016.

([981]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh fighters among 54 killed in 24 hours: MoD, 15 February 2016.

([982]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Probe launched after couple killed in Special Forces raid, 6 September 2015.

([983]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Special Forces gun down 2 more civilians during Khost raid, 11 November 2015.

([984]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 of a family shot dead and injured in Khost, 4 April 2016.

([985]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, pp. 25, 88.

([986]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Children among 4 dead in overnight Khost raid, 9 August 2016.

([987]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Over hundred Taliban dead, scores hurt in Khost offensive, 10 August 2016.

([988]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Child rescued in Khost, 4 abductors detained, 11 March 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 5-member group of kidnappers busted, child rescued, 25 March 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Boy rescued, suspected kidnapper detained in Khost raid, 13 May 2016.

([989]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Hundreds rally in Khost against new e-ID cards, 10 September 2015.

([990]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Teachers' strike closes 71 schools in Khost, 14 September 2015.

([991]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Teachers' strike closes 71 schools in Khost, 14 September 2015.

([992]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 275 teachers being distributed land plots in Khost, 10 November 2015.

([993]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Thousands rally against change in TUTAP project actual route, 15 May 2016.

Displacement

In November 2015, small-scale displacements were profiled in Khost ([994]). In 2015, more than 2,000 new conflict-induced displaced individuals were recorded ([995]).

Due to the Pakistani military operations against militants in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) more than 10,000 Pakistani citizens arrived in Khost and Paktika between September and December 2015 ([996]). Following new military operations in North Waziristan further families arrived in Khost in the first months of 2016 ([997]). About 10,000 refugees from North Waziristan Agency stayed in the Gulan camp of Gurbuz district ([998]).

([994]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, November 2015, p. 2.

([995]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-induced Internal Displacement 2015: The Year In Review, April 2016, p. 7.

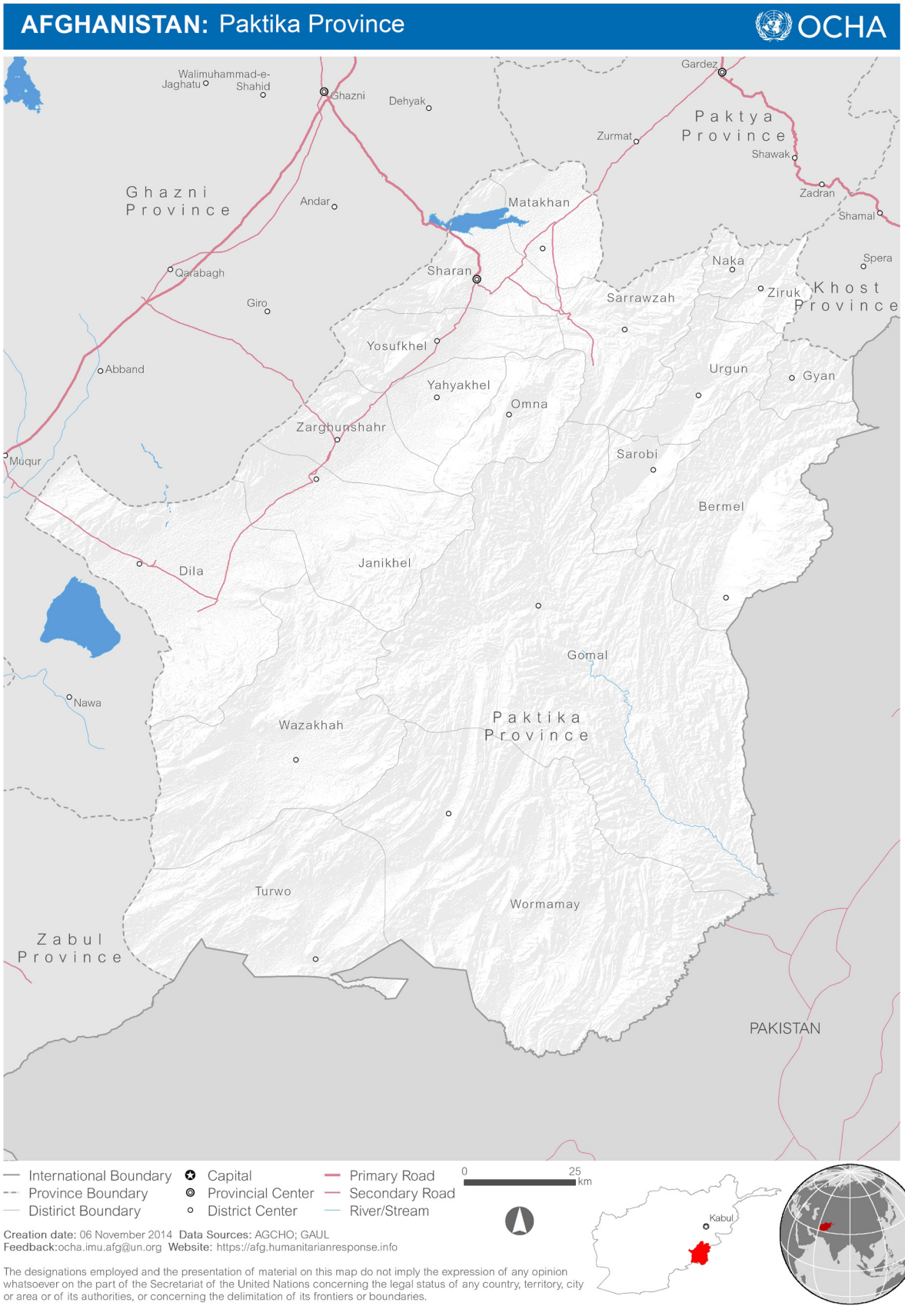
([996]) USAID, Afghanistan - Complex Emergency, 18 December 2015, p. 2.; US Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2015 - Afghanistan, 13 April 2016.

([997]) UNHCR, Afghanistan, Khost & Paktika Situation Update, 10 May 2016, p. 2.

([998]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Waziristan refugees allege anomalies in aid distribution, 19 January 2016.

2.4.4. Paktika

General description of the province



Paktika province borders Paktya and Khost provinces to the north, Zabul to the east, and it shares borders in the north and northwest with the province of Ghazni. In the south and southeast it shares a 360-kilometre border with Pakistan's restive and volatile tribal areas ([999]). Paktika consists of 19 districts: Bermel, Dila, Gomal, Gyan, Janikhel, Matakhan, Naka, Omna, Sarobi, Sarrawzah, Sharan, Turwo, Urgun, Wazakhah, Wormamay, Yahyakhel, Yosufkhel, Zarghunshahr and Ziruk ([1000]). Sharana City is the provincial capital of the province. Paktika has an estimated 434,742 inhabitants ([1001]). The large majority of the population belongs to the Pashtun ethnic group, followed by Tajiks, Arabs and Pashais ([1002]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Paktika

In Paktika a new faction of the Taliban, led by Mullah Obidullah Hunar, has emerged, which did not recognise Mullah Akhtar Mansour as leader ([1003]). The Haqqani network, the TTP and al-Qaeda are also present ([1004]). IS uses Paktika as a recruitment base ([1005]). In January 2015, about 200 IS-linked foreign fighters and their families settled in the southeast, including Paktika province ([1006]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Paktika Province counted 491 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1007]):

Violence targeting individuals	15
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	332
Explosions	56
Security enforcement	84
Non-conflict related incidents	1
Other incidents	3
Total security incidents	**491**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Paktika Province ([1008]):

Wazakhah	76	Sarrawzah	17
Gyan	71	Dila	16
Bermel	50	Ziruk	14
Urgun	46	Yahyakhel	12
Omna	44	Yosufkhel	12
Gomal	37	Wormamay	9
Sharan	30	Zarghunshar	8
Janikhel	23	Sarobi	7
Matakhan	17	Naka	2

According to Khaama Press, Paktika is one of the most volatile provinces in the southeast of Afghanistan ([1009]). The Taliban and the Haqqani network have demonstrated the capability to launch attacks in a number of districts ([1010]).

([999]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Paktika, n.d.

([1000]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktika Province - Reference Map [map], 19 February 2014.

([1001]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1002]) ISW, Regional Command East, n.d.

([1003]) Tolo News, New Taliban Faction Emerges in Paktika, 15 February 2016.

([1004]) Roggio B., US airstrike kills 15 Pakistani Taliban fighters in eastern Afghanistan, 11 September 2015.

([1005]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 23 February 2016.

([1006]) Middle East Institute, Policy Focus 2016-11, The Islamic State in Afghanistan, Examining its Threat to Stability, May 2016, p. 3.

([1007]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1008]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1009]) Khaama Press, Taliban bomb kill 6 member of a single family in Paktika province, 20 February 2016.

([1010]) Khaama Press, Taliban bomb kill 6 member of a single family in Paktika province, 20 February 2016.

In April 2016, Paktika governor, Aminullah Shariq stated that since the launch of the Taliban's spring offensive – Omari – the AGEs conducted 28 attacks in the province; however, security forces repulsed them, killing eight rebels and injuring more than 20 others ([1011]).

The Taliban conducted permanent attacks against **Wazakhah district**. In September 2015, they captured six police checkpoints in the Goshta area of the district but were repelled ([1012]). In October AGEs attacked the district's headquarters but were repelled again ([1013]). At the beginning of November – after more than two weeks of constant attacks – Taliban fighters seized seven villages near the district centre ([1014]). They harassed civilians, blew up police posts and houses ([1015]), blocked all roads to the district centre ([1016]). In December – after two months blockade – they reopened the roads linking Wazakhah, Turwo and Wormamay districts with Sharana on condition that locals stop joining ALP ([1017]). In February 2016, a Taliban-planted IED attack was reported, which killed six members of a family ([1018]), although security forces were targeted ([1019]).

In **Omna district** the Taliban conducted bomb attacks ([1020]), launched attacks against the district headquarter and checkpoints ([1021]) and targeted tribal leaders and government officers ([1022]). In August 2016, foreign forces conducted airstrikes against AGEs in **Omna** district ([1023]).

In September 2015, a major attack was conducted in Sigani village of **Zarghunshahr district**: IEDs were used to target a volleyball game ([1024]). Seventeen civilians were killed and 60 injured in the suicide attack ([1025]). The NDS blamed the Haqqani network for the blast ([1026]).

In **Bermel district** Pakistani forces attacked Afghan border police posts after AGEs fired rockets from Afghan territory into the other side of the Durand Line in November 2015 ([1027]). The cross-border shelling intensified after Pakistan opened a gate built in Afghan territory ([1028]). Due to diplomatic efforts the military installation built in Paktika was handed over to the Afghan government in May 2016 ([1029]).

Officers and local residents in Bermel district stated in January 2016 that Pakistani forces occupied areas near the border and forced people to get Pakistani ID cards if they wanted to commute ([1030]).

In Bermel clashes between the Taliban and AGEs loyal to IS were frequent ([1031]). In February 2016, security officers arrested Hazrat Ali, who was the chief operator of Taliban insurgency in the area ([1032]).

In **Yahyakhel district** two civilians died and six were injured in a bomb blast in October 2015 ([1033]), while in February 2016, six civilians died and nine were injured in a suicide attack, which targeted the district governor, Musa Khan Kharotai ([1034]).

([1011]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 10,000 Paktika youth provided jobs in 4 months: governor, 18 April 2016.

([1012]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Security personnel among 57 dead in Paktika battles, 9 September 2015.

([1013]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Casualties as Taliban attacks beaten back in Paktika, 29 October 2015.

([1014]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban besiege Paktika's Waza Khwa district, 5 November 2015.

([1015]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban besiege Paktika's Waza Khwa district, 5 November 2015.

([1016]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban surround Waza Khwa district centre, 9 November 2015.

([1017]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban conditionally reopen roads in 3 Paktika districts, 24 December 2015.

([1018]) Khaama Press, Taliban bomb kill 6 member of a single family in Paktika province, 20 February 2016.

([1019]) RFE/RL, Land Mine Kills Several Members Of Afghan Family, 21 February 2016.

([1020]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktika deputy police chief among 4 injured in blast, 23 September 2015.

([1021]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Casualties as Taliban attacks beaten back in Paktika, 29 October 2015.

([1022]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill 5 Paktika tribal elders in 3 days: Residents, 7 November 2015.

([1023]) Pajhwok Afghan News, A dozen Taliban killed in Paktika, Paktia airstrikes, 15 August 2016.

([1024]) Khaama Press, Paktika attack widely condemned that left nine killed, 51 wounded, 28 September 2015.

([1025]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, report of the Secretary General, 10 December 2015, p. 8.

([1026]) Khaama Press, Suicide blast leaves six killed, nine wounded in Paktika, 8 February 2016.

([1027]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Militant attack sparks Afghan-Pak border skirmish, 15 November 2015.

([1028]) Khaama Press, Exchange of fire erupts at Pak-Afghan border in Paktika after Pakistan opens gate inside Afghanistan territory, 16 November 2015.

([1029]) Tolo News, Pakistan Hands Over Military Installation to Afghanistan, 21 May 2016.

([1030]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Angoor Ada residents 'forced' to get Pakistani ID cards, 24 January 2016.

([1031]) Khaama Press, Taliban confirm losing 13 fighters in Paktika drone strikes, 13 February 2016.

([1032]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Notorious Taliban commander held in Paktika, 17 February 2016.

([1033]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 civilians dead, 6 wounded in Paktika explosion, 14 October 2015.

([1034]) Khaama Press, Suicide blast leaves six killed, nine wounded in Paktika, 8 February 2016.

In **Janikhel** district the Taliban hanged two policemen in May 2016 ([1035]).

In **Gomal district** clashes were ongoing between rival Taliban factions ([1036]). In September 2015, a drone strike killed 15 TTP fighters ([1037]), while NDS killed eight al-Qaeda members ([1038]). In February 2016, AGEs loyal to the Taliban shadow governor, Asmatullah were killed in a drone strike ([1039]). The same month, at least three al Qaeda affiliated AGEs were killed in a drone strike ([1040]). In April 2016, at least 20 people, including many civilians, died in US air strikes ([1041]).

In **Orgun district** ALP and Taliban fighters clashed when the AGEs attacked an ALP checkpoint in December 2015; a member of the ALP and seven Taliban fighters died ([1042]). In March 2016, a civilian died when ALP fired towards a residential area after AGE had attacked an ALP checkpoint. Local residents staged a peaceful demonstration against the incident in the district centre ([1043]).

In the **provincial capital, Sharana** six civilians were injured in an explosion targeted primarily an ALP commander in January 2016 ([1044]). Close to Sharana, in **Matakhan district**, the Taliban attacked ALP posts in April 2016 ([1045]). The **Dila district** police chief and six of his colleagues were killed by the Taliban in May 2016 ([1046]).

Paktika's education director acknowledged that due to security fears schools were not monitored in Gomal, Wormamay, Wazakhah, Turwo, Gyan, Naka and Bermel districts ([1047]). According to locals, a lot of schools are under Taliban influence ([1048]). The Taliban forced people in Ziruk, Urgun, Omna, Sarrawzah, Gomal, Sarobi, Bermel and Naka districts to give them one-tenth of their total pine-nuts income ([1049]).

Displacement

In November 2015, small-scale displacements were profiled in Paktika ([1050]). Many people were displaced due to the border skirmishes ([1051]) but they returned after the fights had ended ([1052]).

Due to the Pakistani military operations against militants in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) more than 10,000 Pakistani citizens entered Khost and Paktika between September and December 2015 ([1053]). Following new military operations in North Waziristan further families arrived in Paktika in the first months of 2016 ([1054]).

([1035]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban hang two policemen in Paktika, 10 May 2016.

([1036]) Khaama Press, Several killed in Daesh, Taliban clashes in Paktika, 11 February 2016.

([1037]) Khaama Press, Drone strike kills 15 Pakistani militants in Paktika, 11 September 2015.

([1038]) Khaama Press, Senior al-Qaeda commander among eight killed in Paktika, 14 September 2015.

([1039]) Khaama Press, Drone strike kills six Taliban in Paktika's Gomal District, 18 February 2016.

([1040]) Khaama Press, Drone strike leaves 3 Al-Qaeda militants dead in Paktika province, 27 February 2016.

([1041]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Karzai condemns civilian casualties in Paktika drone strike, 9 April 2016.

([1042]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Suspected Pakistanis among 7 insurgents killed in Paktika, 26 December 2015.

([1043]) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Midyear Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 90.

([1044]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians among 8 killed in Paktika, Ghazni incidents, 2 January 2016.

([1045]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 killed, 7 injured in overnight Paktika firefight, 4 April 2016.

([1046]) Pajhwok Afghan News, District police chief among 7 dead in Taliban attack, 17 May 2016.

([1047]) Pajhwok Afghan News, No school in Khoshamand district of Paktika, 11 November 2015.

([1048]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Future of 50,000 schoolchildren at stake in Paktika, 17 December 2015.

([1049]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban forcibly collecting usher in Paktika, claim inhabitants, 10 October 2015.

([1050]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, November 2015

([1051]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Militant attack sparks Afghan-Pak border skirmish, 15 November 2015.

([1052]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 Afghan policeman killed, 4 wounded in border clash, 16 November 2015.

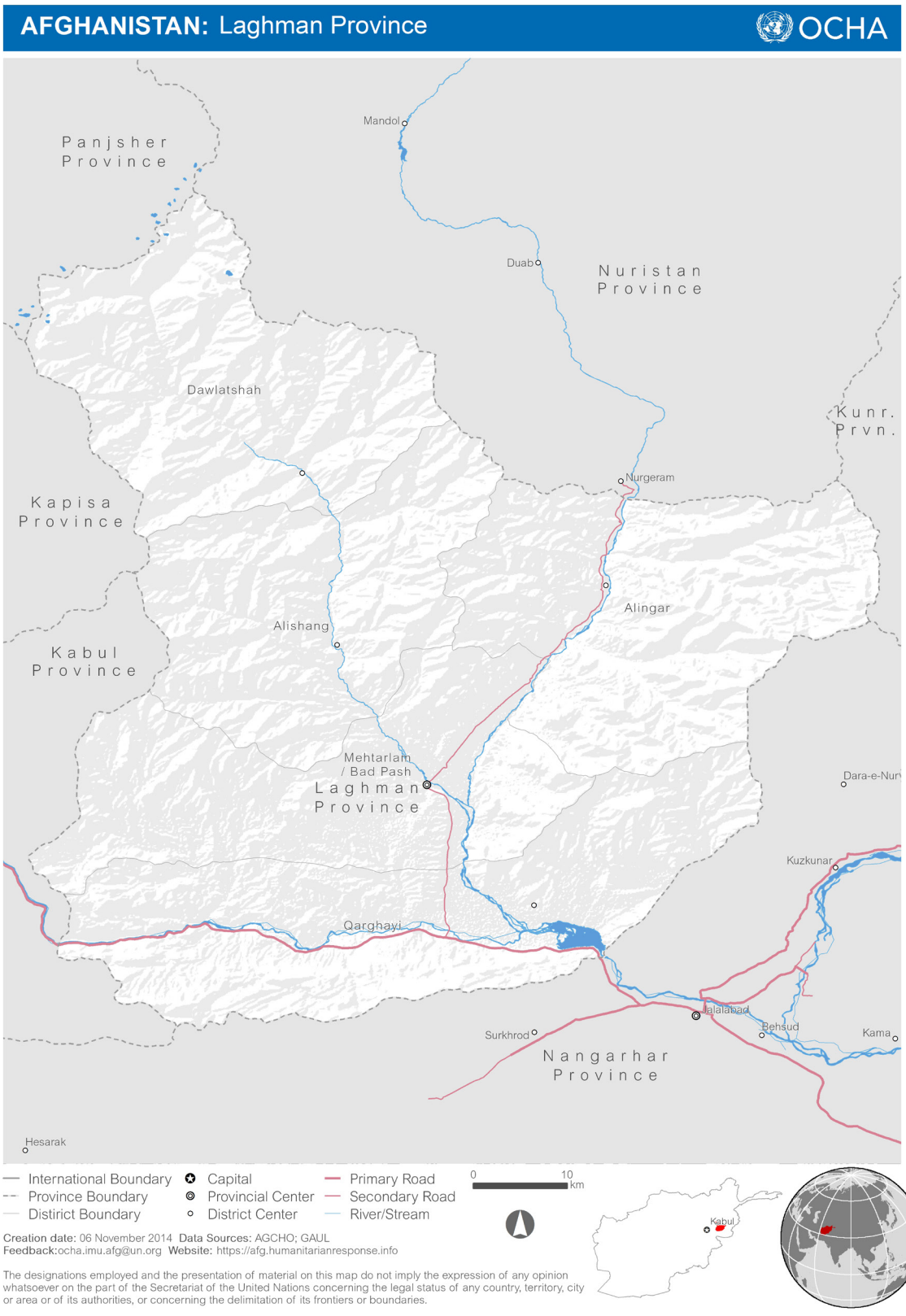
([1053]) USAID, Afghanistan - Complex Emergeny Factsheet, 18 December 2015; US Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2015 - Afghanistan, 13 April 2016.

([1054]) UNHCR, Afghanistan, Khost & Paktika Situation Update, 10 May 2016, p. 2.

2.5. East

2.5.1. Laghman

General description of the province



Laghman Province (capital Mehtarlam) consists of 5 districts: Alingar, Alishang, Dawlatshah, Mehtarlam/Bad Pash and Qarghayi ([1055]) and is predominantly mountainous or semi-mountainous. The province is connected with Kabul and Nangarhar via a main road crossing the district of Qarghayi. According to UNOCHA, 445,588 people live in the province ([1056]). The main ethnic groups are Pashtuns, Tajiks and Gujjars. About 58 % of the population speaks Pashto while others communicate in Dari ([1057]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Laghman

According to Khaama Press, in April of 2016 Laghman was considered to be among the relatively volatile provinces in eastern Afghanistan. AGEs were actively operating in a number of its isolated districts ([1058]).

Religious scholars attended a gathering in Laghman and called on the Taliban to denounce violence and to consent to the government's peace-talks offer. The main goal of the meeting was to strengthen the unity among tribes and to increase efforts at bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan ([1059]).

The Kabul Tribune reported that during 2015 significant achievements were realised in various sectors by the local Laghmani government. These improvements were registered in various sectors, such as security, governance, development as well as overall service delivery to the people of Laghman, in all districts and the capital. This led to continued cooperation with the local administration ([1060]). Nonetheless, AGEs are actively operating in a number of its isolated districts ([1061]).

An international organisation stated that the security situation for the entire province of Laghman remained unstable in 2015 ([1062]). The volatility of the security situation in Laghman Province in 2015 was further highlighted by incidents such as armed clashes, assassinations, intimidations and airstrikes. The security hotspots were areas where AGEs are present, particularly in Alingar, Dawlat Shah, Badpakh and Alishing district. Other aspects of security problems were due to a tribal-dominated society with ethnic differences, a conservative rural population, some of which have fundamentalist religious beliefs, as well as different groups of AGEs, but also organised crime, narcotics, cross-border shelling, cross-border influences and other aspects ([1063]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Laghman Province counted 852 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1064]):

Violence targeting individuals	42
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	719
Explosions	49
Security enforcement	42
Total security incidents	**852**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Laghman Province ([1065]):

Mehtarlam	340	Qarghayi	70
Alisheng	245	Dawlat Shah	29
Alingar	168		

([1055]) UNOCHA, Laghman Province - Reference Map [map], 9 February 2014; MRRD, Laghman Provincial Profile, n.d.

([1056]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1057]) MRRD, Laghman Provincial Profile, n.d.

([1058]) Khaama Press, Policeman kills his 3 comrades in latest insider attack in Laghman, 28 April 2016; Khaama Press, 6 militants killed in Afghan Air Force, army raids in Laghman, 22 February 2016.

([1059]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Laghman clerics urge Taliban to shun violence, accept talks offer, 15 March 2016; Tolo News, Govt To Talk Only With Taliban Groups That Denounce Violence, 28 February 2016.

([1060]) Kabul Tribune, Laghman's notable achievements in 2015, 11 April 2016.

([1061]) Khaama Press, Policeman kills his 3 comrades in latest insider attack in Laghman, 28 April 2016.

([1062]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015; Khaama Press, Policeman kills his 3 comrades in latest insider attack in Laghman, 28 April 2016; Khaama Press, 6 militants killed in Afghan Air Force, army raids in Laghman, 22 February 2016.

([1063]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015.

([1064]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1065]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

A large-scale coordinated attack by the Taliban carried out on the district of Dawlat Shah in October 2015 was repelled by the security forces. The security forces also foiled the Taliban's plan of occupying the district ([1066]). During a military operation in November 2015, in the district of Behsoud in Nangarhar, the Taliban governor for the province, Aminuallah Kuchi, was captured by security forces ([1067]). In December 2015, two local commanders of the Taliban militant group were killed in an aerial attack in the district of Alishing ([1068]). In January 2016, a senior commander of the Taliban was killed during clashes with the Afghan military in the district of Alishing. Three other AGEs were also killed in the clash ([1069]). In February, a magnetic IED attached to an ANP vehicle exploded in the city of Mehterlam. A dozen civilians were injured during this incident which took place near a bank ([1070]). In March 2016, raids, armed clashes, as well as attacks by rockets and air, took place in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan and Laghman ([1071]). In mid-March the deputy district police chief of Nuristan (a neighbouring province of Laghman), was killed in an attack in Laghman ([1072]). In April 2016, at least three policemen were killed in an insider attack, according to local security officials. The incident took place at a security post in Mehtarlam ([1073]). In May 2016, a commander for the Taliban, Mullah Saboor, was killed along with three other Taliban in the district of Bad Pakh Shaitan in the village of Gum Shaidan. According to the NDS the group of Mullah Saboor was planning a suicide attack along with 11 other fighters before the commander was killed ([1074]). In June 2016, a roadside bomb killed two civilians and wounded 16 others in Alisheng ([1075]). Also in June, eight civilians were wounded by the detonation of a magnetic IED in the capital Mehterlam ([1076]). In July 2016, a magnetic bomb attached to a police vehicle detonated in Alisheng, injuring an ALP member and six civilians ([1077]). In August 2016, a magnetic bomb attached to a police vehicle detonated in Mehterlam, injuring four civilians ([1078]).

Displacement

Only small-scale displacements have been profiled for Laghman for the months of September ([1079]), October ([1080]) and November 2015 ([1081]).

([1066]) Khaama Press, Security forces foil Taliban plan to capture Laghman's Dawlat Shah District, 17 October 2015.

([1067]) Khaaama Press, NDS detain Taliban shadow governor for Laghman province, 4 November 2015; UPI, Afghanistan: More than 50 militants killed in countrywide operations, 15 November 2015.

([1068]) Press TV, Fresh US assassination drone raid kills two in eastern Afghanistan, 30 December 2015.

([1069]) Bakhtar News, Taliban Senior Commander Killed In Laghman Clash, 20 January 2016.

([1070]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 52.

([1071]) BAMF, Briefing Notes, 4 April 2016; BAMF, Briefing Notes, 14 March 2016.

([1072]) BAMF, Briefing Notes, 21 March 2016.

([1073]) Khaama Press, Policeman kills his 3 comrades in latest insider attack in Laghman, 28 April 2016.

([1074]) Khaama Press, Taliban suicide attacks organizer killed in Laghman province, 31 May 2016.

([1075]) New Afghan Press, Roadside Bomb Kills 2 Civilians, Injures 16 Others In Laghman, 3 June 2016.

([1076]) Tolo News, Eight Civilians Wounded in Laghman Blast, 23 June 2016.

([1077]) Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP official, 6 civilians injured in Laghman bomb attack, 22 July 2016.

([1078]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 civilian injured in Laghman, NDS agent shot dead in Faryab, 1 August 2016.

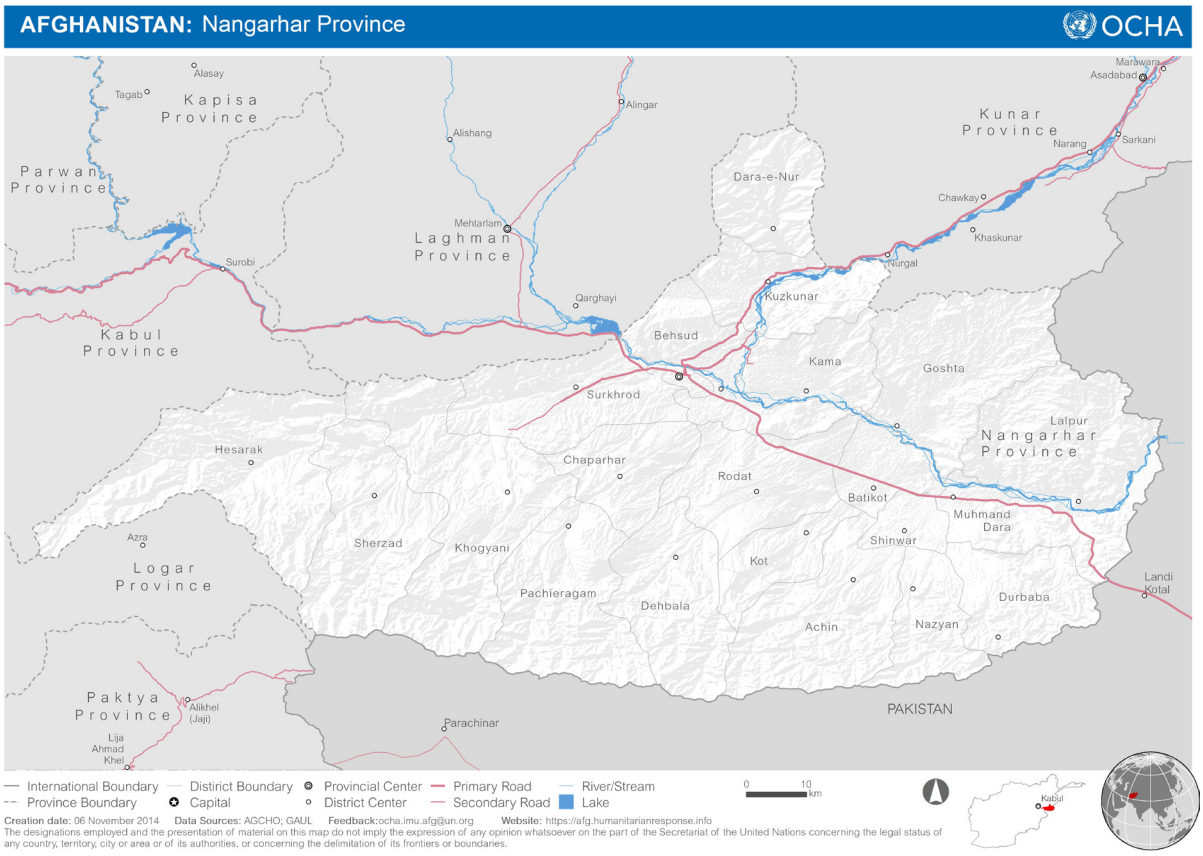
([1079]) UNHCR, Afghanistan Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Update, September 2015.

([1080]) UNHCR, Afghanistan Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Update, October 2015.

([1081]) UNHCR, Afghanistan Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Update, November 2015.

2.5.2. Nangarhar

General description of the province



Nangarhar Province (capital Jalalabad) consists of 22 districts (Achin, Batikot, Behsud, Chaparhar, Dara-e-Nur, Dehbala (or Hasqa Mina) ([1082]), Durbaba, Goshta, Hesarak, Jalalabad, Kama, Khogyani, Kot, Kuzkunar, Lalpur, Muhmand Dara, Nazyan, Pachieragam, Rodat, Shinwar, Surkhrod, Sherzad ([1083]) and is mainly mountainous and semi-mountainous ([1084]). Of the 1,517,388 inhabitants ([1085]), 90 % are Pashtuns while the remaining population consists of Pachay, Tajiks, Gujjars and Kuchis ([1086]). Jalalabad has an estimated population of 226,029 ([1087]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Nangarhar

AGEs have infiltration and movement hotspots in Nangarhar Province along the border with Pakistan. In 2015, the majority of the security incidents occurred in Hisarak, Achin, Khogyani, Sherzad, Chaparhar, Bati-Kot, Dih-Bala, Pachir-Wa-Agam, Kot, Lal Pur and Nazyan Districts. Other security concerns are caused by a tribal-dominated society with ethnic differences, a conservative rural population, of which some have fundamentalist religious beliefs, as well as different groups of AGEs, but also organised crime, narcotics, cross-border shelling, cross-border influences and poor governance ([1088]).

Khaama Press reported in March 2016 that Nangarhar was considered to be among the relatively volatile provinces, in which AGEs, including Taliban fighters, as well as IS loyalists, were actively operating in a number of its secluded districts ([1089]).

([1082]) Afghan biographies, Haska Mina District Nangahar Province, 12 November 2014.

([1083]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Administrative Divisions, 14 January 2014; MRRD, Nangarhar Provincial Profile, n.d., p. 1.

([1084]) MRRD, Nangarhar Provincial Profile, n.d.

([1085]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015; USAID, Afghanistan: Central Statistics Organization (CSO) Estimated Population 1394 (2015-2016), 16 December 2015.

([1086]) MRRD, Nangarhar Provincial Profile, n.d.

([1087]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1088]) Western security analyst, anonymous source specialised in security in Afghanistan, emails and briefing, July - October 2015.

([1089]) Khaama Press, ISIS loyalists suffer casualties after ambushing Afghan forces in Nangarhar, 20 March 2016.

In January 2015, IS officially announced its presence in Afghanistan. It grew from Pakistani militants who had settled since 2010 in the southeastern districts of the province of Nangarhar and their ranks include other Pakistani militants who arrived during 2014 and former Taliban members ([1090]). The district of Achin ([1091]) in Nangarhar was chosen as the group's headquarters for various reasons, including proximity to the Pakistani border, easy access to weapons and logistical supply routes ([1092]). Its presence was limited to the districts of Achin, Deh Bala and Chaparhar of Nangarhar ([1093]). IS attempted to expand its territory beyond Nangarhar Province but failed ([1094]). It clashed heavily with the Taliban in Nangarhar and, initially, it did not target ANSF ([1095]). In July 2015, ANSF stepped in and on multiple occasions conducted offensive operations against IS in the districts of Achin, Kot, Nazian and Bati until June 2016, sometimes with US air support. As a result the districts of Achin and Kot were recaptured. Nonetheless, in other instances the operations have made no gains, since some of the territory was retaken by the group. The Afghan government relied excessively on 'so-called popular forces, militias raised by local power-brokers and run by the NDS'. These forces were able to stop IS from gaining further territory and in return became primary targets for IS attacks ([1096]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Nangarhar Province counted 1,901 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1097]):

Violence targeting individuals	127
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	1,049
Explosions	199
Security enforcement	460
Non-conflict related incidents	55
Other incidents	11
Total security incidents	**1,901**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Nangarhar Province ([1098]):

Achin	250	Kot	91
Bihsud	158	Pachir Wa Agam	73
Hisarak	142	Lal Pur	50
Jalalabad	135	Rodat	50
Mohmand Dara	127	Nazyan	44
Surkh Rod	125	Sherzad	35
Bati Kot	114	Kama	27
Khogyani	113	Goshta	25
Shinwar	102	Kuz Kunar	24
Chaparhar	98	Dur baba	18
Dih Bala	92	Dar-i Nur	8

([1090]) Reuters, Al Qaeda re-emerges as challenge for U.S., NATO in Afghanistan, 15 April 2016; AAN, The Islamic State in 'Khorasan': How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar, 27 July 2016.

([1091]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Why Daesh chose Achin district as its base in Afghanistan, 9 May 2016; Khaama Press, Security forces kill 24 Daesh militants in Nangarhar, 12 March 2016.

([1092]) Pajhwok, Why Daesh chose Achin district as its base in Afghanistan, 9 May 2016.

([1093]) Reuters, Al Qaeda re-emerges as challenge for U.S., NATO in Afghanistan, 15 April 2016.

([1094]) AAN, The Islamic State in 'Khorasan': How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar, 27 July 2016.

([1095]) NY Times, Afghan ISIS Branch Makes Inroads in Battle Against Taliban, 13 October 2015; IB, ISIS In Afghanistan: US Airstrikes, Afghan Forces Target Islamic State in Group in Eastern Afghanistan, 23 February 2016; AAN, The Islamic State in 'Khorasan': How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar, 27 July 2016.

([1096]) AAN, The Islamic State in 'Khorasan': How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar, 27 July 2016.

([1097]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1098]) For more information on the source and the methodology of the maps, see introduction.

The overall security situation in the province of Nangarhar is volatile ([1099]). In August 2016, Tolo News indicated Nangarhar was the most volatile province in Afghanistan ([1100]).

In the provincial capital **Jalalabad**, in October 2015, a remote-controlled IED exploded against a minibus carrying staff of Afghanistan´s Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), killing two human-rights workers and injuring six others ([1101]). A plane crash in the same month killed 11 people, including service members of the United States. The incident took place at Jalalabad airport. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the incident, stating via social media that it shot down the plane ([1102]) In December 2015, five people were killed by a suicide bomb in Jalalabad. This happened during the detention of Russian-speaking people who, according to an official source, were planning to join IS. Among the detained were five men, one female and three children ([1103]). In January 2016, 13 civilians were killed and 14 others were injured in a suicide attack in Jalalabad City ([1104]). The Afghan security forces killed two gunmen following a suicide bomb attack near the Pakistani consulate. According to a high-ranking Afghan official, seven Afghan servicemen were killed during the incident, and seven others were injured. It was stated that three civilians were also injured. IS claimed responsibility for the attack which took place in January 2016 ([1105]). In March 2016, a suicide bomber detonated a vehicle filled with explosives outside the entrance of the Indian consulate in Jalalabad ([1106]), killing two people and injuring 19 others ([1107]). In July 2016, two civilians were killed and 17 others wounded in a suicide attack in Jalalabad City ([1108]). In August 2016, three people playing sports were injured in a landmine blast in Jalalabad ([1109]).

In September 2015, during clashes between security forces and IS in the district of Achin, 35 AGEs were killed. According to an official source two soldiers were killed and another two were wounded ([1110]). In October, the NDS arrested AGEs in Nangarhar. The AGEs were involved in several terrorist activities, including planting landmines and assassinating prominent figures. The AGEs initially planned to attack military and civilian vehicles. Also a variety of arms were found in their possession ([1111]). The district chief of Aching stated in November 2015 that AGEs had attacked a security checkpoint in Abdul Khel. During clashes that lasted for hours, the security forces killed a dozen IS fighters and wounded several others ([1112]). During clashes in January 2016, security forces killed 15 IS AGEs. Initially the AGEs planned to attack a security post in the area of Saluram Farm in the district of Bati Kot. An unspecified number of AGEs were wounded in this incident. No civilian casualties were reported, although a police officer suffered light injuries ([1113]). During a US airstrike in February 2016, the "Voice of the Caliphate", an IS-operated radio station, was destroyed. The "Voice of the Caliphate" was illegally broadcasting throughout Nangarhar, calling on fighters to join the group ([1114]). In March 2016, security forces foiled an IS plan to attack security posts in the areas of Deh Sarak und Pansar in the district of Achin. Twenty four rebels were killed ([1115]). According to officials, 12 people died in April 2016 when a suicide bomber drove his rickshaw into a bus full of members of the ANA. An additional 38 were injured ([1116]). During 24 hours in May 2016, at least a dozen IS fighters were killed during various NATO drone strikes in Nangarhar ([1117]). In June 2016, IS fighters overran several ANSF posts in the district of Kot ([1118]). They also torched civilian houses, causing the displacement of hundreds of families from Kot, and abducted inhabitants ([1119]).

([1099]) Western security official, anonymous source specialised in security in Afghanistan, emails and briefing, July - October 2015; Khaama Press, ISIS loyalists suffer casualties after ambushing Afghan forces in Nangarhar, 20 March 2016.

([1100]) Tolo News, Afghan Civilian Casualty Toll Up By 82% in July, updated on 8 August 2016.

([1101]) UNAMA, UNAMA condemns murder of human rights workers, 26 October 2015.

([1102]) RFE/RL, Eleven Dead As U.S. Plane Carrying Troops Crashes In Afghanistan, 2 October 2015.

([1103]) NY Times, Bomb Rocks Kabul's Diplomatic Quarter and Starts a Standoff, 11 December 2015.

([1104]) UNAMA, UNAMA condemns attack in Jalalabad, 17 January 2016.

([1105]) RFE/RL, Gunmen Killed After Pakistan Consulate Attack In Afghanistan, 13 January 2016.

([1106]) RFE/RL, Civilians, Militants Killed In Attack On Indian Consulate In Afghanistan, 2 March 2016.

([1107]) Ariana News, Nangarhar mass attack killed 2, injured 19 others, 2 March 2016.

([1108]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 dead, 17 wounded in Nangarhar suicide bombing, 2 July 2016.

([1109]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 sportsmen injured in Jalalabad blast, 28 August 2016.

([1110]) Khaama Press, 35 Daesh militants killed in clash with security forces in Nangarhar's Achin District, 27 September 2015.

([1111]) Press TV, Afghanistan security forces arrest nine militants in Nangarhar, 15 October 2015.

([1112]) Afghanistan Times, 12 Daesh fighters killen in Nangarhar, 20 November 2015.

([1113]) Khaama Press, 15 Daesh militants killed in clash with security forces in Nangarhar, 5 January 2016

([1114]) Business Insider, Airstrikes destroy ISIS radio station in Afghanistan, 2 February 2016

([1115]) Khaama Press, Security forces kill 24 Daesh militants in Nangarhar, 12 March 2016

([1116]) Tolo News, 12 killed In Nangarhar Suicide Attack, 11 April 2016

([1117]) Pajhwok, 12 Daesh militants killed in Nangarhar drone strikes, 26 May 2016

([1118]) AAN, The Islamic State in 'Khorasan': How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar, 27 July 2016.

([1119]) 1 TV News, IS militants torch 90 houses in Nangarhar, 27 June 2016; Press TV, Daesh-linked terrorists abduct 30 in Afghanistan's Nangarhar, 25 June 2016.

According to reports, approximately 100 strikes against IS in Khorasan were conducted by the US forces in the first three months of 2016 ([1120]). It was reported that IS violence prevented 33,000 children from attending school in the districts of Achin, Haskamena, and Kot ([1121]).

Displacement

UNHCR reported that from mid-June 2015 until February 2016 continuous displacement occurred in the eastern region – particularly in the province of Nangarhar. As a result of several military operations, as well as clashes between various groups such as the Taliban and IS affiliators, displacement occurred in the districts of Kot, Achin and Chaparghar ([1122]).

In September 2015, 918 families or 5,483 individuals were displaced in the province of Nangarhar. The IDPs registered originated from the districts of Kot, Achin, Khugyani, Nazyan, Ghani Khel and Shirzad ([1123]). In October 2015, 1,920 families or 12,323 individuals were displaced. The IDPs were displaced from/within the districts of Kot, Achin, Chaparhar, Deh Bala, Nazian and Shirzad ([1124]). In November 2015, 970 families or 5,910 persons/individuals were displaced in Nangarhar Province. The IDPs were displaced within Nangarhar, from the districts of Kot, Achin, Hesarak and Pachiragam ([1125]).

In June 2016, the displacement of hundreds of families were reported from districts in Nangarhar where fighting with IS groups was taking place ([1126]). This happened again in July ([1127]).

([1120]) Reuters, Al Qaeda re-emerges as challenge for U.S., NATO in Afghanistan, 15 April 2016

([1121]) Voa News, Afghan Students Out of School in IS-Controlled Areas, 21 March 2016.

([1122]) UNHCR, Major situations of conflict-induced displacement in the first months of 2016 Summary note for Afghanistan Protection Cluster, 24 February 2016.

([1123]) UNHCR, Afghanistan Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Update, September 2015.

([1124]) UNHCR, Afghanistan Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Update, October 2015.

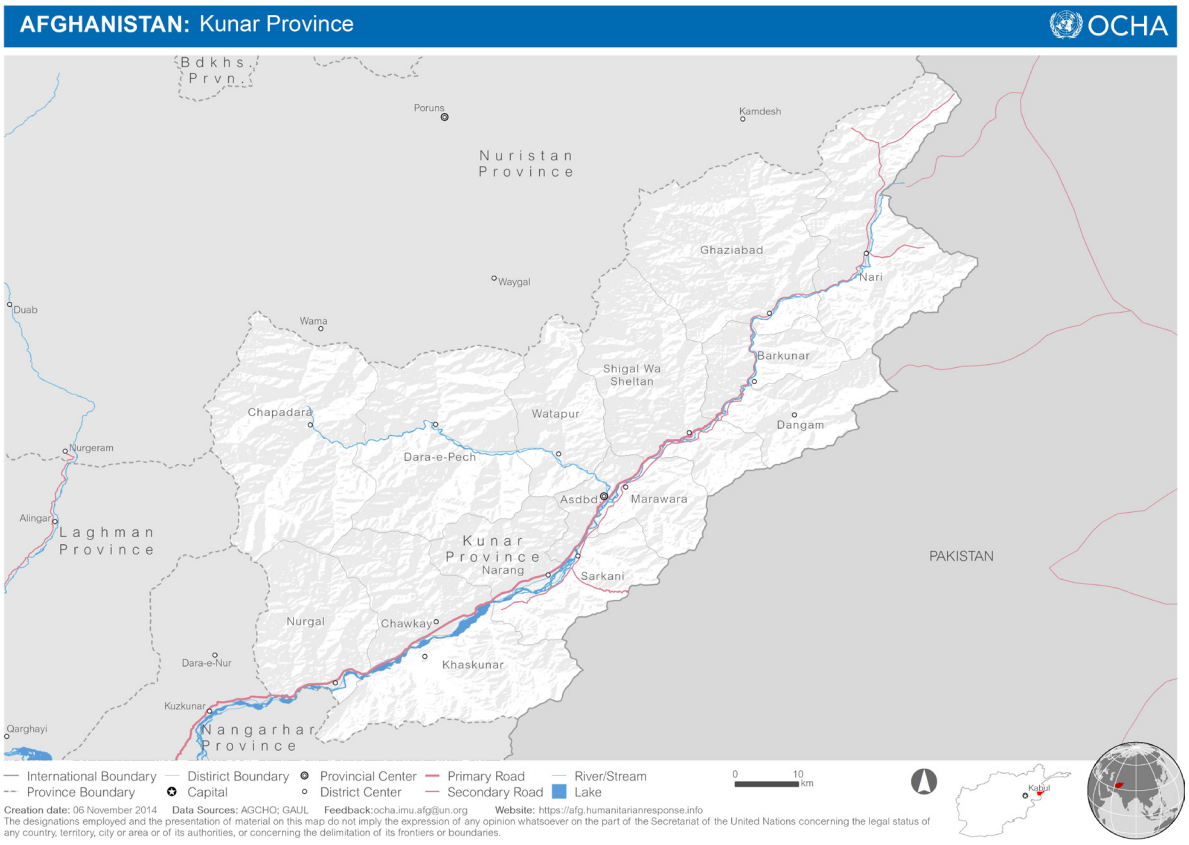
([1125]) UNHCR, Afghanistan Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Update, November 2015.

([1126]) 1 TV News, IS militants torch 90 houses in Nangarhar, 27 June 2016; Press TV, Daesh-linked terrorists abduct 30 in Afghanistan's Nangarhar, 25 June 2016; Daily Outlook Afghanistan, Hundreds of Families Displaced After Taliban and Daesh Clash in Nangarhar, 16 June 2016.

([1127]) Ariana News, Nangarhar clashes leave 300 families displaced, 19 July 2016.

2.5.3. Kunar

General description of the province



Kunar Province is composed of 15 districts: Asadabad, Barkunar, Chapadara, Chawkay, Dangam, Dara-e-Pech, Ghaziabad, Khaskunar, Marawara, Narang, Nari, Nurgal, Sarkani, Shigal wa Sheltan, Watapur ([1128]). Its capital, Asadabad, is divided by the main road which links Jalalabad (Nangarhar administrative centre) to Nuristan Province and Pakistan. According to UNOCHA, 450,652 people live in the province ([1129]), mostly Pashtun ([1130]). Kunar has a 170-kilometre border with the Pakistani tribal areas ([1131]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Kunar

Khaama Press reported that AGEs including Taliban fighters were operating in a number of districts in Kunar and frequently carry out insurgency activities ([1132]).

In September of 2015 an intensification of ISAF/ANSF military operations aimed at removing the Pakistani fighters including Taliban, TTP, Al-Qaeda, Hezb-e Islami, Lashkar-e Taeeba, Lashkar-e Mujahedeen, Albadar Mujahedeen and Salafis. Nevertheless, the security situation in this province remained volatile and the AGEs entered Kunar from the Pakistani side of the border. The ANSF is faced with hit-and-run attacks by the AGEs who then flee back to Pakistan when meeting armed resistance ([1133]). According to the report of the Secretary General of the United Nations, military operations in neighbouring Nangarhar, as well as pressure from the Taliban, led IS to establish a small, secondary presence in the province of Kunar ([1134]). UNAMA confirmed this presence ([1135]).

([1128]) UNOCHA, Kunar province - Reference Map, 19 February 2014.

([1129]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1130]) Tolo News, Provincial profile: Kunar, n.d.

([1131]) Roggio, B., Quetta airbase attacks carried out by Pakistani Taliban, IMU, 17 August 2014.

([1132]) Khaama Press, Taliban militants suffer casualties after attacking Kunar security posts, 13 April 2016.

([1133]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015.

([1134]) UNGASC, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 June 2016.

([1135]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016.

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Kunar Province counted 1,470 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1136]):

Violence targeting individuals	70
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	1,279
Explosions	69
Security enforcement	49
Other incidents	3
Total security incidents	**1,470**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Kunar Province ([1137]):

Sirkanay	295	Chapa Dara	72
Nari	255	Wata Pur	63
Ghaziabad	126	Nurgal	52
Marawara	123	Chawkay	49
Dangam	120	Asadabad	31
Bar Kunar	88	Narang	19
Shaygal Wa Shiltan	83	Khas Kunar	17
Dara-i Pech	77		

According to Khaama Press in April 2016, Kunar was among the volatile provinces in eastern Afghanistan ([1138]).

A bomb attack in the provincial capital **Asadabad** killed at least 28 civilians in September 2015 ([1139]). In February 2016, a suicide bomber killed at least 11 and wounded 40 in a park in the city of Asadabad. Most of the victims were civilians including children ([1140]). In March 2016, a magnetic IED detonated in Asadabad, killing an ANA soldier and injuring seven others, including civilians ([1141]). In August 2016, an explosion in a market building in Asadabad injured 10 civilians ([1142]). Two weeks later, a rocket attack against a gathering in Asadabad centre on Independence Day killed two civilians and wounded 49 others ([1143]).

In the rest of the province, in September 2015, fighting and airstrikes took place ([1144]). At least four civilians were killed by a bomb attack in December 2015 ([1145]). In January and February 2016, again fighting, airstrikes and cleansing operations by ANSF were reported ([1146]). During March ([1147]), April ([1148]) and May ([1149]) 2016 fighting in the province of Kunar was reported. A key road between eastern Nuristan and Kunar provinces was blocked by a rockslide and Taliban fighters obstructed efforts to reopen the road. Security forces launched the operation "Sher Ghashai" (Lion Arrow) in May 2016 to reopen the road, which succeeded, as was confirmed by residents ([1150]). In April 2016, the Taliban suffered casualties after attacking security posts in Marwara and Sarkano districts of Kunar Province ([1151]). In

([1136]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1137]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1138]) Khaama Press, Taliban militants suffer casualties after attacking Kunar security posts, 13 April 2016.

([1139]) BAMF, Briefing Notes, 21 September 2015.

([1140]) Guardian (The), Taliban suicide bombings kill Afghan civilians, 27 February 2016.

([1141]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 ANA soldier killed, 6 injured in Kunar blast, 24 March 2016.

([1142]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 civilian injured in Asadabad blast, 3 August 2016.

([1143]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunar: 2 dead, 49 hurt as rocket hits I-Day function, 18 August 2016.

([1144]) BAMF, Briefing Notes, 14 September 2015.

([1145]) BAMF, Briefing Notes, 14 December 2015.

([1146]) BAMF, Briefing Notes, 8 February 2016.

([1147]) BAMF, Briefing Notes, 14 March 2016.

([1148]) BAMF, Briefing Notes, 4 April 2016.

([1149]) BAMF, Briefing Notes, 9 May 2016.

([1150]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Nuristan-Kunar road reopens after military offensive, 28 May 2016.

([1151]) Khaama Press, Taliban militants suffer casualties after attacking Kunar security posts, 13 April 2016.

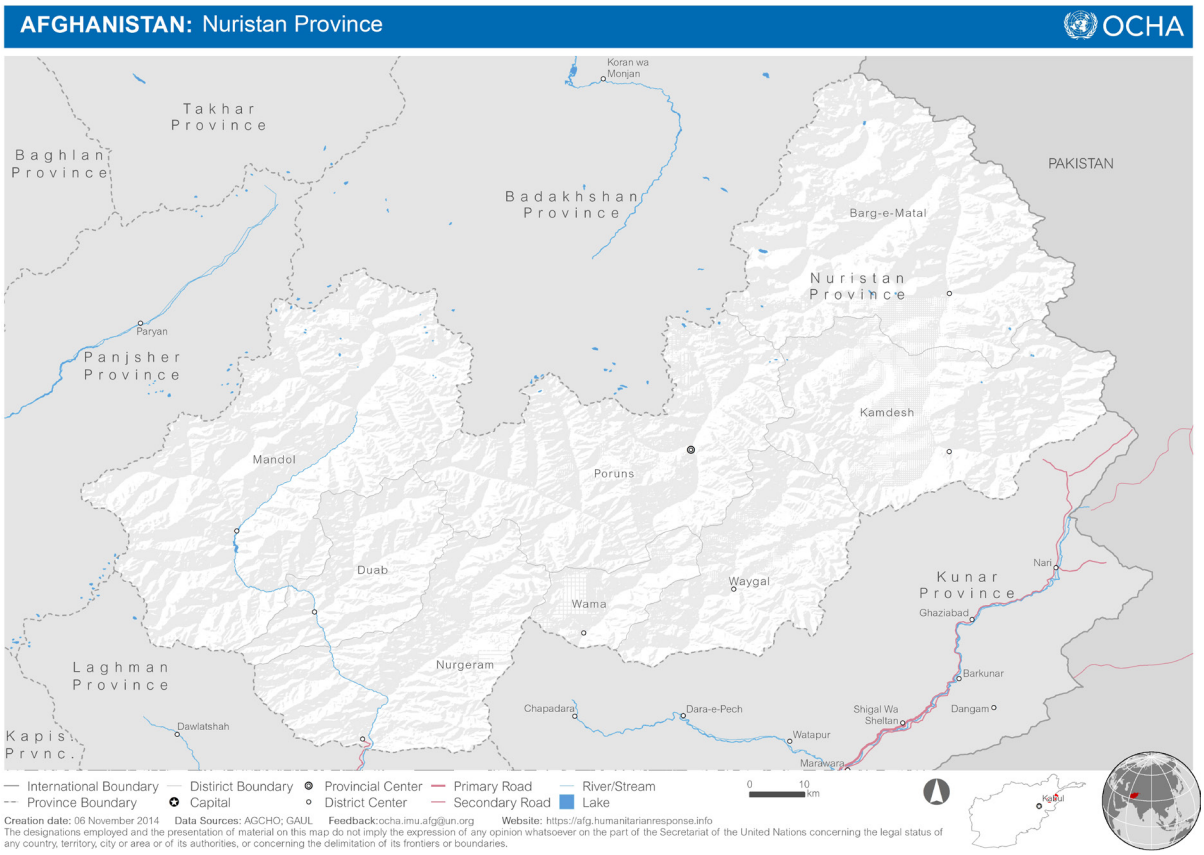
June 2016, clashes were reported in Sarkano district between TTP and Afghan Taliban groups, which killed several insurgent fighters ([1152]). In the same month it was reported that Afghan border provinces, including Kunar, had suffered the previous months from cross-border shelling causing civilian casualties and material damage ([1153]).

Displacement

Only small-scale displacements have been profiled for Kunar Province for September ([1154]), October ([1155]) and November 2015 ([1156]).

2.5.4. Nuristan

General description of the province



According to UNOCHA, the population of this province is 147,967. The province of Nuristan, surrounded by Laghman, Panjshir, Badakshan and Kunar provinces ([1157]), borders Pakistan in the east, and comprises eight districts: Barg-e-Matal, Duab, Kamdesh, Mandol, Nurgeram, Poruns, Wama and Waygal ([1158]). The capital of Nuristan is Parun ([1159]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Nuristan

Due to limited access to information, the lack of international community and IMF/ANSF presence throughout the province, an accurate assessment of the security situation is difficult. Nevertheless, it has been reported that Nuristan Province has inadequate ANSF structure, no permanent ANA forces and no sufficient ANSF military operations to tackle infiltration by Pakistan-based militants such as the TTP, Al-Qaeda, Hezb-e-Islami, Lashkar-e-Taeeba,

([1152]) Kabul Tribune, 14 Taliban militants killed in an infighting in eastern Kunar province, 24 June 2016.

([1153]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Border skirmishes: Kabul, Islamabad trade blame at UN, 22 June 2016.

([1154]) UNHCR, Afghanistan Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Update, September 2015.

([1155]) UNHCR, Afghanistan Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Update, October 2015.

([1156]) UNHCR, Afghanistan Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Update, November 2015.

([1157]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1158]) UNOCHA, Nuristan: Reference Map, 19 February 2014.

([1159]) Pajhwok, Background Profile of Nuristan, n.d.

Lashkar-e-Mujahedeen, Albadar Mujahedeen and Salafis. As a result the security situation remains volatile in this province ([1160]). AGEs are operating in a number of Nuristan's districts and often carry out insurgency activities ([1161]). Parun, the provincial capital, has a government presence but it is not connected to six of Nuristan's seven districts. One of these districts, Barg-e-Matal, has remained under Taliban control for years ([1162]).

In December 2015, it was reported that the Taliban claimed that nearly 200 security personnel and 140 government officials defected to the jihadist group in the embattled province of Nuristan. However, these Taliban claims were not verified ([1163]). In April 2016 it was reported that IS lost large parts of its territories in the country, particularly in the eastern province of Nangarhar and that now its fighters are fleeing towards Nuristan Province ([1164]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Nuristan Province counted 75 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1165]):

Violence targeting individuals	3
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	63
Explosions	8
Security enforcement	1
Total security incidents	**75**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Nuristan province ([1166]):

Kamdesh	39	Nurgaram	6
Waygal	14	Barg-e Matal	5
Du Ab	8	Parun	3

In September 2015, the Taliban attacked ANSF checkpoints in **Kamdish** district. The police received air support and 15 AGEs were reportedly killed ([1167]). In November 2015 at least four Pakistani AGEs were killed in Nuristan Province after a group of AGEs crossed the border and opened fire on border police ([1168]). In March and April 2016, fighting, airstrikes, rocket attacks, raids etc. took place in Nuristan ([1169]). In March 2016, it was reported that the Afghan Air Force (AAF) helicopters attacked AGEs amid ongoing clashes in **Duab** district of Nuristan Province. Heavy gun battles between the Afghan security forces and the AGEs was also reported ([1170]). In April 2016, joint operations by the Afghan army, police force and air force were conducted in **Nurgeram** districts. Another operation was conducted in **Kamdish** district ([1171]). In June 2016, AGEs attacked an ANSF checkpost but were repelled after ANSF received support from Afghan Air Force and IMF air strikes, reportedly killing more than 70 AGEs ([1172]). Also in June, it was reported that Afghan border provinces, including Nuristan, had suffered the previous months from cross-border shelling causing civilian casualties and material damage ([1173]).

In August 2015, dozens of Taliban fighters stormed the **Waygal** district centre but ANSF repulsed the attack ([1174]).

([1160]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015.

([1161]) KHAAMA Press, Afghan army helicopters pound militants amid ongoing clashes in Nuristan, 24 March 2016.

([1162]) NY Times, Afghan Province Tucked in Mountains Lies Beyond Reach of Aid and Time, 25 December 2015.

([1163]) LWJ, Taliban claims hundreds of military personnel, government officials defect in Nuristan, 1 December 2015.

([1164]) Tolo News, Daesh Losing Territory in Afghanistan:NATO Alliance, 15 April 2016.

([1165]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1166]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1167]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Security personnel among 19 dead in Kamdish battle, 12 September 2015.

([1168]) Tolo News, Four Pakistani Insurgents Killed in Nuristan Clash: Border Officials, 22 November 2015.

([1169]) BAMF, Briefing Notes, 4 April 2016.

([1170]) Khaama Press, Afghan army helicopters pound militants amid ongoing clashes in Nuristan, 24 March 2016.

([1171]) Khaama Press, Senior Taliban leader among 10 killed in Afghan forces raids in Nuristan, 8 April 2016.

([1172]) Khaama Press, 73 Taliban insurgents killed in Afghan, US forces airstrikes in Nuristan, 30 June 2016.

([1173]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Border skirmishes: Kabul, Islamabad trade blame at UN, 22 June 2016.

([1174]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban storm Nuristan's Want Waigal district, 14 August 2016.

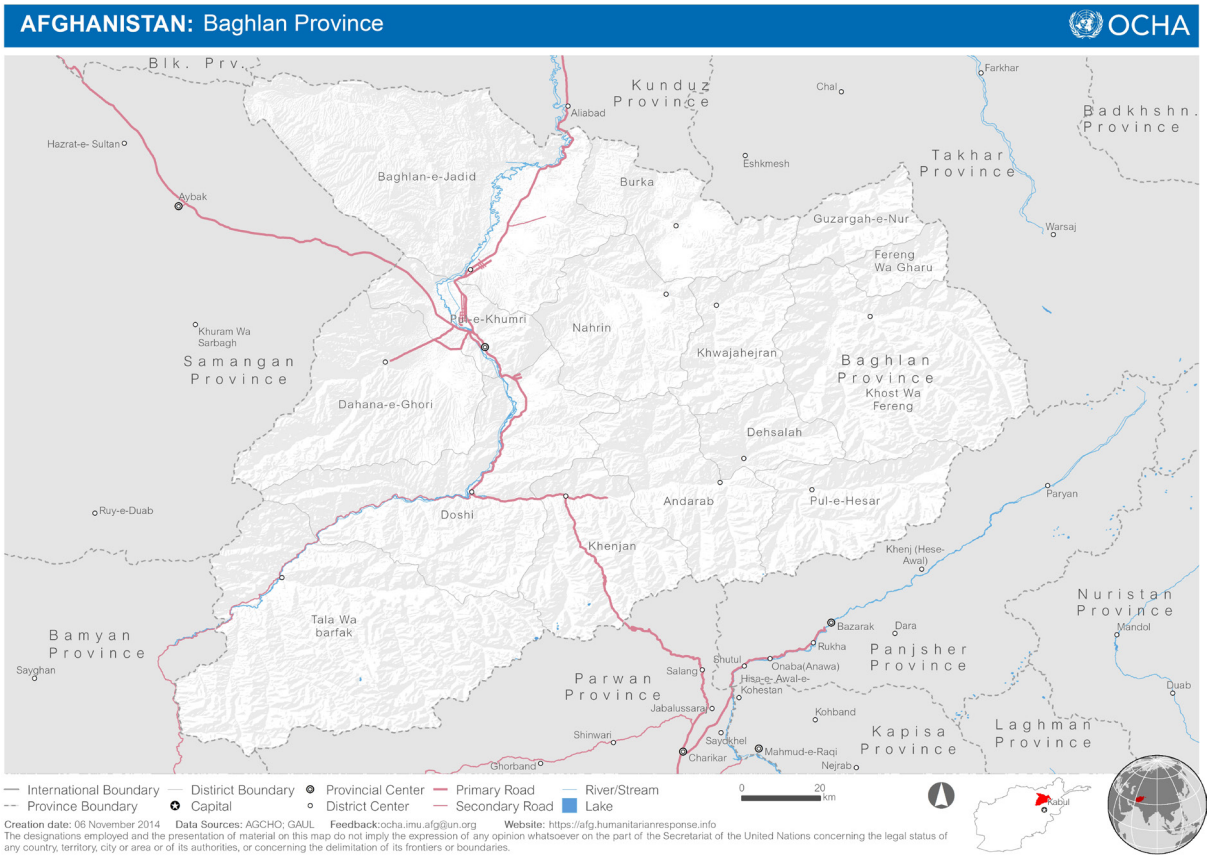
Displacement

For the month of October ([1175]), November ([1176]) 2015 only small-scale displacements have been recorded for Nuristan Province. A large number of conflict-induced IDPs from Nuristan live in Nangarhar ([1177]).

2.6. North-East

2.6.1. Baghlan

General description of the province



According to UNOCHA, the population of this province is 910,784 (47.6 % female and 52.4% male) ([1178]). The province of Baghlan (capital: Pul-e-Khumri), surrounded by Bamian, Samangan, Kunduz, Takhar, and Parwan provinces, lies on the main route to north and northeastern regions of Afghanistan ([1179]) and comprises diverse ethnic groups (mainly Tajiks, also Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Turkmens and Ismailis) ([1180]). This province is made up of the following districts: Andarab, Baghlan-e-Jadid, Burka, Dahana-e-Ghori, Dehsalah, Doshi, Fereng Wa Gharu, Guzargah-e-Nur, Khenjan, Khost Wa Fereng, Khwajahejran, Nahrin, Pul-e-Hasar, Pul-e-Khumri ([1181]) and Tala Wa Barfak ([1182]). Its principal income is derived from agriculture, boosted by the water sources of the Baghlan-Kunduz river system, and from energy plants and modest industrial enterprises, notably the Ghori cement factory, the sugar mill, hydropower plants, and coal mines ([1183]).

([1175]) UNHCR, Afghanistan Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Update, October 2015.

([1176]) UNHCR, Afghanistan Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Update, November 2015.

([1177]) Community World Service, Situation Update Afghanistan: Continuous Conflict & Displacement in Northeastern Parts, 8 October 2015.

([1178]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1179]) MRRD, Provincial Profile: Baghlan, n.d.

([1180]) AAN, Baghlan on the Brink: ANSF weaknesses and Taliban resilience, 31 May 2013.

([1181]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Baghlan Province – District Atlas, April 2014.

([1182]) UNOCHA, Baghlan Province – Reference Map, 19 February 2014.

([1183]) Goodhand, J. and Hakimi, A., Counterinsurgency, local militias, and statebuilding in Afghanistan, USIP, January 2014.

President Ghani appointed a new governor for Baghlan Province in October 2015 to improve the administration ([1184]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Baghlan

Insurgent groups active in the province include the Taliban, Jundullah groups and Islamic State of Khorasan. All groups are recruiting fighters in Baghlan ([1185]). Also the activity of armed Hezb-e Islami (Gulbuddin Hekmatyar) men was reported in the province ([1186]).

The occupation of Kunduz City by the Taliban in September and October 2015 demoralised people of Baghlan and the ANSF, especially in and around **Pul-e-Khumri district.** Local residents believed the Taliban would attack Pul-e-Khumri. They recounted how the police checkposts on the section of the highway passing through Dand-e Ghuri area had been abandoned. The pro-government militias were also a security concern as, in the aftermath of the fall of Kunduz, a number of Jihadi commanders in the region mobilised a large number of supporters to back the government forces in their fight against the Taliban. Hundreds of Tajik young men, essentially from **Andarab**, registered with the police as belonging to various militia units, although such militias do not appear in the ministry of interior's charts. They were affiliated with Jamiat-e Islami and linked to the local governance and security establishment ([1187]).

The United Nations closed its office in Baghlan Province as cautionary measure ([1188]). The UN Secretary-General reported that: 'as a consequence of the increased risks posed by the conflict, particularly in urban areas, civilian actors, including the United Nations, necessarily curtailed programme activities and temporarily relocated staff from Kunduz, Baghlan and Badakhshan provinces' ([1189]). IS fighters settled their families in this area, notably in **Burka** district, and were trying to recruit fighters ([1190]).

In 2016, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on the weak morale of the ANSF in Baghlan province and their lack of military equipment causing their incapability of effectively battling the Taliban ([1191]).

Recent Security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Baghlan Province counted 415 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1192]):

Violence targeting individuals	36
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	280
Explosions	37
Security enforcement	53
Non-conflict related incidents	9
Total security incidents	**415**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Baghlan Province ([1193]):

Pul-e Khumri	215	Khost Wa Firing	5
Baghlan-e Jadid	113	Tala Wa Barfak	5
Dushi	24	Dih Sala	4
Dahan-e Ghuri	16	Nahrin	3
Burka	13	Andarab	2
Khinjan	13	Pul-e Hisar	2

([1184]) Khaama Press, President Ghani appoints four new provincial governors, 8 October 2015.

([1185]) Tolo News, Daesh 'Deployment' in Baghlan Triggers Alarm Among Residents, 10 December 2015.

([1186]) Pajhwok Afghan News, HIA fighters in control of 2 Baghlan coalmines, 21 July 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, HIA gunmen driven from Baghlan coalmines, 7 August 2016.

([1187]) AAN, The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, 21 October 2015.

([1188]) ABC News, The Kunduz legacy: 13,000 families flee Afghanistan's battle-torn region, 15 October 2015.

([1189]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 December 2015.

([1190]) Tolo News, Daesh 'Deployment' in Baghlan Triggers Alarm Among Residents, 10 December 2015.

([1191]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan police incapable to fight against Taliban: police chief, 14 July 2016.

([1192]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1193]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

During the two-week Taliban occupation of Kunduz City in September and October 2015, there was also a strong insurgent presence in the province of Baghlan, immediately in south of Kunduz. They held up the security forces' convoys for days in Baghlan with road blocks and ambushes ([1194]). The Afghan forces recaptured the Baghlan-Kunduz Road in October 2015 ([1195]). Nevertheless, in December 2015, Baghlan residents continued to be concerned about the security situation on the highway around Pul-e-Khumri district[1196]. After the fall of Kunduz, the Taliban looted weapons, equipment and money which it transferred to Pul-e-Khumri and **Baghlan-e-Jadid** ([1197]).

In December 2015, children and women were among the victims killed when unexploded munitions went off in Pul-e Khumri district ([1198]).

UNAMA reported in its 2016 midyear report in Baghlan Province the sexual abuse of a boy by an ALP unit suspected of abusing also other boys. UNAMA also reported that the ANA occupied four schools in the Dand-e-Ghori area, preventing students, including 200 girls, and teachers, including 50 women, from accessing these schools ([1199]).

Civilians were forced to dig trenches for the Taliban in this province. The AGEs took dozens of youths for work daily ([1200]).

The power supply from Uzbekistan to Kabul was cut in January 2016 after the Taliban blew up a power pylon near Pul-e-Khumri and a technical team could not travel to the area which was controlled by AGEs. However, a Taliban spokesman denied it was behind the sabotage ([1201]). In the same month, the Taliban warned telecommunication companies to switch off their towers at night. Residents faced problems informing relatives in emergency situations ([1202]). Also in January 2016, at least 47 AGEs, including Pakistanis, were killed in military operations in the province. The Taliban claimed that it destroyed two army vehicles. It planted landmines on roads and agricultural fields, and warned local residents against coming out of their houses ([1203]).

The Baghlan Journalists Association condemned violence against journalists in this province. In February 2016, two officials of a private radio station were shot and injured in the capital of the province. Two local television staff members and many journalists had received threats from unknown callers ([1204]).

During a conference in Kabul in February 2016, civil-society activists claimed that nearly 800 civilians suffered casualties because of clashes between security forces and the Taliban in Baghlan: at least 135 civilians, including 40 women and children, were killed in different areas in Baghlan. The provincial governor announced that 130 AGEs, including their eight commanders, were killed, and 95 AGEs, including Pakistani rebels, were wounded in military operations ([1205]).

Clashes between security forces and AGEs continued in March 2016 and caused casualties in both sides as well as among civilians in Baghlan. The Taliban retreated from Salang area towards Joye Naw and Ahmadzai villages. Security forces recaptured Niazullah, Akakhel and Arab Tapa villages in Salang area ([1206]).

In April 2016, the ANCOP arrested the driver of an international humanitarian organisation, accusing him of supplying medicines to AGEs and seized the organisation's vehicle in Baghlan-e Jadid district ([1207]).

In the same month, AGEs attacked ANSF installations and positions in many areas in Baghlan Province. Both AGEs and ANSF used heavy weapons including rocket-propelled grenades and artillery ([1208]). AGEs attacked on 11 April 2016

([1194]) AAN, The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, 21 October 2015.

([1195]) UPI, Afghan forces in Kunduz recapture road leading to Kabul, 6 October 2015.

([1196]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan residents concerned at insecurity on key Anchor highway, 27 December 2015.

([1197]) AAN, The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, 21 October 2015.

([1198]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 children killed, 15 injured in Baghlan blast, 1 December 2015; Pajhkwok Afghan News, 3 women killed, as many teens injured in Baghlan blast, 15 December 2015.

([1199]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016 - Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, pp. 20-21.

([1200]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan residents forced into digging trenches for Taliban, 23 January 2016.

([1201]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Technicians fear Taliban to repair Kabul power supply line, 27 January 2016.

([1202]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan residents forced into digging trenches for Taliban, 23 January 2016.

([1203]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Pakistanis among 47 militants killed in Baghlan, 31 January 2016.

([1204]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 radio workers shot injured in Baghlan, 4 February 2016.

([1205]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan residents call for ceasefire as civilians suffer, 11 February 2016.

([1206]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Man dead, children wounded in Baghlan rocket strike, 1 March 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Casualties as security forces, Taliban clash in Dand-i-Ghori, 1 March 2016.

([1207]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016 - Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016.

([1208]) UNOCHA, Flash Update n°1: Conflict in North-eastern Afghanistan, 17 April 2016.

ANSF installations and positions in Shahbudin, Gajji, Kunduz Tepa, Qandari and Qutub Khel areas of **Baghlan-e-Jadid** district. On 13 April 2016, ANSF were reported to have shelled AGEs positions near Pul-e-Dolcha village, approximately 2 kilometres from a roadway corridor to Dand-e-Shahbudin District in Baghlan Province ([1209]). At the end of April, the Taliban, which already controlled Shahr-e-Naw or Bazaar Postak area, was close to **Dahana-e-Ghori** district. Four Taliban fighters were killed in the clash, five injured and two others arrested while trying to flee the area disguised in women's clothes ([1210]). Earlier in the month, the provincial governor, concerned by the **Dand-e-Ghori** situation, asked the central government to dispatch additional security forces to Baghlan ([1211]). In May 2016, about 78 security officials, including local police and uprising members, were rescued after being besieged by Taliban fighters who captured the Surkh Kotal locality of Baghlan province ([1212]). On 14 May 2016, the Taliban claimed major gains in Pul-e-Khumri ([1213]).

In May 2016, AGEs attacked family members of a deceased ALP agent in Baghlan-e-Jadid district, killing four girls, two boys, and two women, and injuring two boys ([1214]).

In July 2016, armed men set a school on fire in the district of Nahrin ([1215]).

In August 2016, Pajhwok reported on AGEs attacking military bases and the district centre of Dahana-I Ghori. The attack on the district centre was reportedly repelled and followed military operations against AGEs in Dahana-I Ghori district. Nevertheless, a few days later, the district was seized by the Taliban ([1216]).

In August 2016, HRW published a report on the military use of schools in Baghlan by the ANSF and of the Taliban hampering children's right to education and putting their lives at risk. The report was based on a research mission in April 2016. HRW's research identified 12 schools in Baghlan that were used for military purposes ([1217]).

Displacement

In the wake of Kunduz' occupation by the Taliban in September and October 2015, hundreds of mainly middle-class and well-off families fled from Pul-e-Khumri district to Kabul ([1218]).

In the beginning of 2016, a large number of individuals were displaced by intense fighting in Dand-e-Ghori ([1219]).

In April 2016, following fighting in Pul-e-Khumri district, approximately 300 families were displaced to Pul-e-Khumri City, Baghlani Jadid District centre and surrounding areas ([1220]).

As of 30 April 2016, nearly 29,000 people had been displaced due to security fears in Baghlan ([1221]).

([1209]) UNOCHA, Flash Update n°1: Conflict in North-eastern Afghanistan, 17 April 2016.

([1210]) The Frontier Post, Taliban closing in on Dohn-i-Ghori, 28 April 2016.

([1211]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Governor demands reinforcements as Baghlan clashes continue, 16 April 2016.

([1212]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 78 Baghlan security men rescued from Taliban siege, 18 May 2016.

([1213]) LWJ, Taliban offensive in north stresses Afghan military, 16 May 2016.

([1214]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016 - Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 51.

([1215]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan school set alight by unidentified gunmen, 3 July 2016.

([1216]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Bariz blames security forces for Dahna-i-Ghori's fall, 15 August 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan's Dahna-i-Ghori district falls to Taliban, 15 August 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, More than 100 killed in fresh wave of violence: MoD, 13 August 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban attack on Dehna Ghori pushed back: Baghlan governor, 10 August 2016.

([1217]) HRW, Afghanistan: Rise in Military Use of Schools, 17 August 2016.

([1218]) AAN, The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, 21 October 2015.

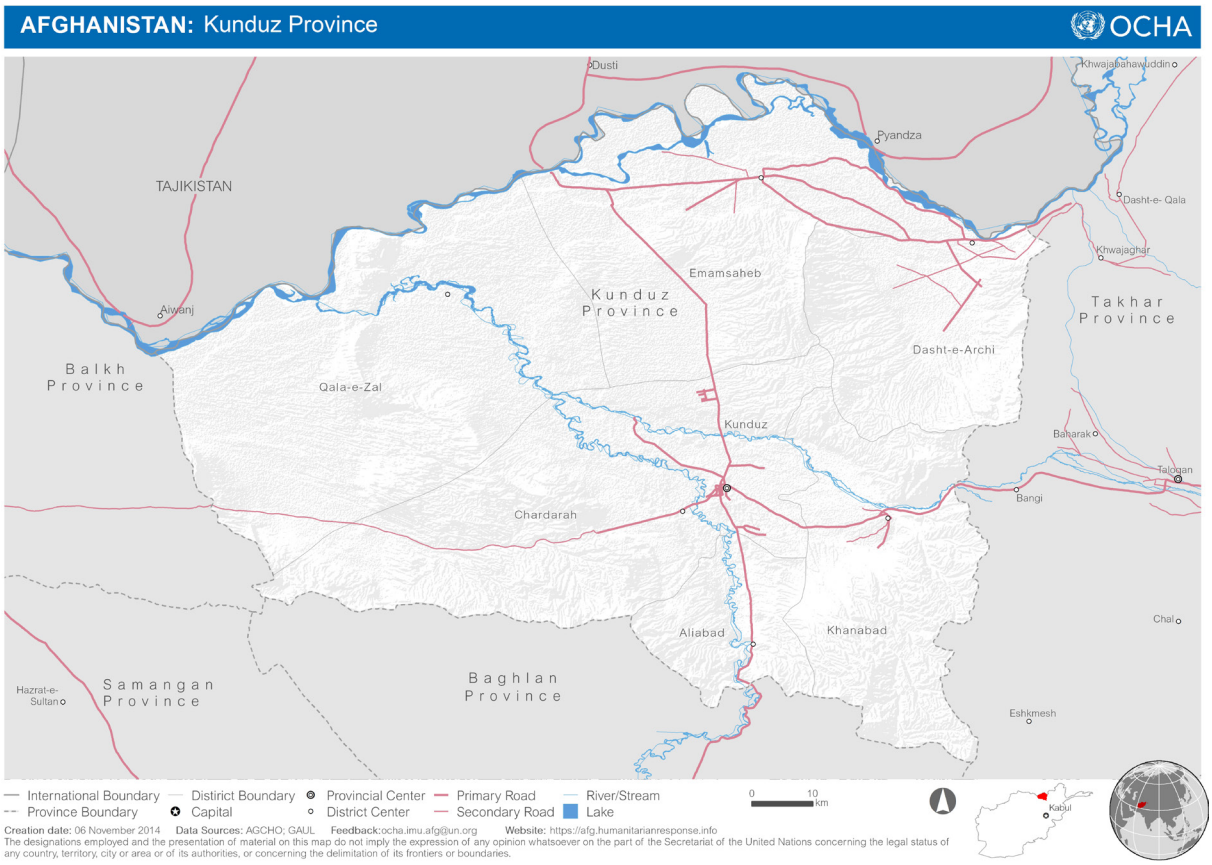
([1219]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016 - Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 32.

([1220]) UNOCHA, Flash Update n°1: Conflict in North-eastern Afghanistan, 17 April 2016.

([1221]) UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin – Afghanistan- Issue 51/ 01-30 April 2016, 15 May 2016.

2.6.2. Kunduz

General description of the province



According to UNOCHA, the population of this province is 1,010,037 (48 % female and 52 % male) ([1222]). Kunduz, surrounded by Balkh, Takhar, and Baghlan provinces, and by Tajikistan, is made up of Aliabad, Chahar Dara, Dasht-e-Archi, Emamsaheb, Khanabad, Kunduz and Qala-e-Zal districts ([1223]) as well as the recently created three districts of Aqtash (formerly part of Khanabad), Kalbad (formerly part of Emamsaheb) and Gur Tepa (formerly part of Kunduz City) ([1224]). It lies in the northern region of Afghanistan, and comprises diverse ethnic groups (Pashtuns (34 %), Uzbeks (27 %), Tajiks (20 %) and Turkmens (9.4 %). This mix has often led to inter-ethnic tensions over control of Kunduz which is crossed by the strategic trade route north to Tajikistan ([1225]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Kunduz

The security was threatened in the province by conflict between AGEs and ANSF ([1226]).

By 2008, hundreds of Taliban fighters and other AGEs from Pakistan had arrived in the district of Chahar Dara, which with a pre-dominantly Pashtun population became the main insurgent hub in Kunduz Province. Other insurgent groups present include Jundullah (IMU) and some commanders related to the Haqqani network ([1227]).

In 2014, the Taliban advanced in the province with several areas under its control, including the districts of Chahar Dara and Dasht-e Archi. The districts of Imam Sahib and Aliabad were under serious pressure and the Taliban forces

([1222]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1223]) Humanitarian Response, Kunduz: Province Atlas, April 2014.

([1224]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghani fires Kunduz NDS officials, approves 3 new districts, 26 November 2015.

([1225]) News (The), Wounded flood trauma centre as Taliban attack Afghan city, 25 August 2014.

([1226]) UNOCHA, Flash Update N°1 : Conflict in North-eastern Afghanistan, 17 April 2016.

([1227]) AAN, The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Beyond Kunduz city – lessons (not taken) from the Taliban takeover, 30 January 2016.

were closing in on the Kunduz City Centre. As a result of a military operation in Pakistan, called *Zarb-e-Azb* (the name of a sword used by the Prophet Muhammad in battles), against groups linked to al Qaeda, more IMU and other foreign fighters relocated to Kunduz ([1228]).

According to AAN, the Taliban also overran **Dasht-e Archi** district (locally known as just Archi) in June 2015. Since then, the district, homeland of Kunduz Province shadow governor Mullah Salam Baryalai, has become another stronghold for the AGEs in the province with training camps frequently visited by commanders from other parts of Afghanistan and also occasionally from Central Asia. The Taliban established a strong military commission in Archi district before the assault on Kunduz City. This commission organises all military affairs throughout the province. It includes the provincial shadow governor, the shadow district governor of Archi, military commanders and military experts from other parts of the province ([1229]).

The security situation continued to worsen in Kunduz. Pro-government militias and ALP were accused of crimes such as illegal taxation, robbing and rape. The ALP had a long history of abuses that Human Rights Watch documented in a report as far back as 2011. The government took some measures to prevent the enlistment of pre-existing, illegal militias in the ALP. Nevertheless, the vetting process failed, allowing many armed groups to make their status official under the flag of the ALP, regardless of their previous abuses and human-rights violations ([1230]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Kunduz Province counted 416 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1231]):

Violence targeting individuals	35
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	334
Explosions	20
Security enforcement	23
Non-conflict related incidents	3
Other incidents	1
Total security incidents	**416**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Kunduz Province ([1232]):

Kunduz	162	Chahar Dara	40
Khanabad	75	Qala-i Zal	21
Dasht-e Archi	60	Aliabad	17
Emamsaheb	41		

On 28 September 2015, in a large-scale attack, the Taliban, with child soldiers in its ranks ([1233]), overran the city of Kunduz, took control of most areas, freed hundreds of prisoners from the jail, seized key buildings and advanced on the airport. Foreign groups such as al Qaeda, Jundullah, IMU, Lashkar-e Tayeba and Jombesh-e Nasr-e Tajikistan participated in this attack. Since the fall of the Taliban regime, it was the first time the insurgent movement seized a provincial capital ([1234]). Residents, mainly women activists, were frightened by the door-to-door searches led by the Taliban after seizing the city. The women social workers received threats even after they left Kunduz ([1235]).

([1228]) AAN, The Fall of Kunduz: What does it tell us about the strength of the post-Omar Taliban?, 30 September 2015; Cecchinel, Lola, Taleban Closing in on the City: The next round of the tug-of-war over Kunduz, 2 September 2014.

([1229]) AAN, The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Beyond Kunduz city – lessons (not taken) from the Taliban takeover, 30 January 2016.

([1230]) Diplomat (The), Afghanistan: After Kunduz, 16 December 2015.

([1231]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1232]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1233]) NY Times, Taliban Used Child Soldiers in Kunduz Battle, Rights Group Says, 17 February 2016.

([1234]) BBC, Taliban overrun afghan city of Kunduz, 28 September 2015; AAN, The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Beyond Kunduz city – lessons (not taken) from the Taliban takeover, 30 January 2016.

([1235]) Diplomat (The), Afghanistan: After Kunduz, 16 December 2015.

People injured by the fighting were treated in the *Médecins sans Frontières* (MSF) hospital in the province. The Afghan authorities reportedly suspected the Taliban was taking shelter in the hospital. On the night of 3 October 2015, the complex of the MSF hospital was damaged by US airstrikes. Many patients and MSF staff were injured or killed in the attack. The US military blamed ANSF for misleading information ([1236]).

Members of the Afghan National Assembly criticised the Government's handling of the Kunduz crisis and on 2 November the Lower House tabled a vote of no confidence in the Minister of the Interior which did not pass ([1237]). According to the head of a government-appointed inquiry commission: 'Misuse of resources and lack of coordination among security forces were the other principal reasons for the brief capture of the capital of northern Kunduz province' ([1238]). In the wake of these political and security developments, President Ghani sacked national security officials who neglected their duty to defend Kunduz. He appointed a governor and a provincial chief of police for Kunduz ([1239]). Three new districts were created in the province. But in the beginning of 2016 these districts were still under Taliban's control ([1240]).

By October 2015, following a strong Taliban presence and activity in Kunduz, access to this province was limited. Supply deliveries, even food, were more viable when made by air ([1241]). In the same month, Afghan forces succeeded in recapturing the Baghlan-Kunduz road from Taliban fighters. This road merges with other routes leading into Kabul. Kunduz Province supplies half of the country's rice and it is crossed by major roads leading to central and northern parts of the country ([1242]).

In November 2015, AGEs, including 200 foreign fighters, took control of 40 % of **Emamsaheb** district ([1243]).

In the first half of 2016, the case of an ALP commander arresting a 16 year-old boy was reported. The commander raped the boy during three days of detention ([1244]).

In February 2016, Taliban fighters looted and torched houses of ALP personnel and other pro-government people in **Kunduz City** as well as in the districts of **Khanabad**, **Aliabad** and **Aqtash**. They blocked the Kunduz-Baghlan highway for eight hours in a clash in which 23 AGEs and five policemen were killed ([1245]).

In February 2016, Taliban fighters, including the Archi district shadow governor, were reportedly killed in an attack by the security forces ([1246]). In April 2016, the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced that the district was cleared of Taliban and its key hideouts were destroyed ([1247]).

Four hundred entrepreneurs and traders, scared by the propaganda of the Taliban, left Kunduz Province for security reasons, badly affecting the economic condition in spite of security guarantees promised by the police ([1248]). After residents and civil-society activists staged protests against mounting security risks due to the increased activities of AGEs, such as harassment and sporadic fighting in Kunduz Province, President Ghani met the youth, elders, MPs and Provincial Council representatives in February 2016 and introduced Asadullah Omarkhail as the new governor of the province ([1249]).

However, in April 2016, there was continued fighting between AGEs and ANSF on the outskirts of Kunduz City and other locations in all districts of Kunduz Province. There was no electricity during this conflict ([1250]). Power returned to Kunduz City in August 2016 ([1251]). Also in April 2016, the Taliban declared the beginning of its annual spring offensive. Officials of the province warned that the military equipment stolen by the Taliban during their takeover

([1236]) Monde (Le), Centre MSF de Kunduz : histoire d'une bavure, 8 October 2015.

([1237]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 December 2015.

([1238]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Saleh finds leadership failure behind fall of Kunduz City, 21 November 2015.

([1239]) Reuters, Afghan president sacks security officials over fall of Kunduz, 26 November 2015.

([1240]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Newly created Kunduz districts still under Taliban control, 11 January 2016.

([1241]) Foreign Policy, On the Road to Kunduz: Follow an FP Contributor's Journey on Instagram, 1 October 2015.

([1242]) United Press International (UPI), Afghan forces in Kunduz recapture road leading to Kabul, 6 October 2015.

([1243]) Tolo News, Insurgents Still Control 40 Percent of Imam Sahib, 13 November 2015.

([1244]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016 - Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 20.

([1245]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban embark on arson campaign in Kunduz, 3 February 2016.

([1246]) Frontier Post (The), Taliban, security forces suffer casualties in Kunduz, 22 February 2016.

([1247]) Ministry of Defense, Dasht-e-Archi Cleared Of Taliban, Key Hideouts Destroyed, 24 April 2016.

([1248]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 400 traders leave Kunduz for security reasons, 8 February 2016.

([1249]) Tolo News, Ghani Meets Kunduz Residents, Introduces New Governor, 10 February 2016.

([1250]) UNOCHA, Flash Update N°1 : Conflict in North-eastern Afghanistan, 17 April 2016.

([1251]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Power returns to Kunduz after a week-long blackout, 24 August 2016.

was posing a serious threat to Kunduz City ([1252]) while the provincial governor maintained that 'the security situation [was] absolutely normal' ([1253]). In the same month the Kunduz district governor said that 30 AGEs were killed and 20 wounded within the **Kunduz City's limits** ([1254]) where hundreds of insurgent fighters were trying to cut off **Chahar Dara** district and stop the government reinforcements. Four members of security forces were killed and 11 wounded. Six dead and 107 wounded were brought over three days to city hospitals which were put under heavy strain since the destruction of the MSF hospital in 2015 ([1255]).

In the district of **Chahar Dara,** which has a long history of insurgency presence though it is just 1.5 kilometres from the district head's office, the Taliban continued to pose a serious threat. There were also foreign fighters in this district. In February 2016, the Taliban's shadow governor for this district was arrested during a raid by the special units of police ([1256]). In April 2016, 28 Taliban fighters were killed and 38 wounded in Chahar Dara and **Khanabad** ([1257]). On 12 April 2016, two ANA helicopters fired rockets that hit a residence in Chahar Dara, injuring 15 civilians. In spite of ANSF's clearing operations in Chahar Dara, the Taliban was threatening the government by operating in large areas of the district. Clearing operations helped the ANSF to take back the control over only some areas in the district centre and a portion of road leading to Kunduz City ([1258]). AGEs reportedly managed to temporarily break through ANSF lines before being pushed back by airstrikes and ground troops on 16 April 2016 ([1259]). At the end of April 2016, ANA officials reportedly took back Chahar Dara district after an operation during which house-to-house searches were conducted in many villages. During this military operation, at least 100 Taliban fighters, including key commanders, were killed and wounded ([1260]).

The Taliban captured **Qala-e-Zal** district's bazar and some other parts of the district in April 2016 after a fierce clash with security forces ([1261]). An insurgent commander and six of his fighters were killed in the clash[1262].

In May 2016, Taliban fighters kidnapped at least 185 passengers from 4 buses, 3 vans and 3 cars on the Kunduz-Takhar highway in **Aliabad** district ([1263]). They killed 17 of them, kept at least 18 passengers and released the others after interrogation ([1264]). In the same month, Taliban fighters continued its operations, notably on highways leading to Kunduz, by taking hostages or executing passengers suspected of connections to the government, and travelling in buses and civilian vehicles ([1265]).

Government forces continued to target AGEs through drone strikes and other air attacks in Kunduz Province ([1266]). In August 2016, residents and provincial council members complained about the deteriorating security situation, with AGEs seizing more territory, and they feared Kunduz City might collapse again soon ([1267]). Tolo News reported that Kunduz City was under siege: a strategic bridge near the city was attacked by the Taliban and an attempted attack on Kunduz airport was repelled by ANSF. Clashes were ongoing in different other parts of the province but a large-scale military offensive against the AGEs that was promised to the residents of Kunduz City never occurred ([1268]).

Displacement

Following an escalation in conflict between AGEs and ANSF in Kunduz Province, at least 100 families were displaced in April 2016 to Taloqan City, the capital of Takhar Province, according to an IDP screening committee. However,

([1252]) NY Times, Taliban Attack Kunduz City, Alarming Afghans, 15 April 2016.

([1253]) Express Tribune (The), Afghan forces repel Taliban in Kunduz as spring fighting begins, 15 April 2016.

([1254]) Express Tribune (The), Afghan forces repel Taliban in Kunduz as spring fighting begins, 15 April 2016.

([1255]) Reuters, Heavy fighting continues in Afghan city Kunduz, 17 April 2016.

([1256]) Khaama Press, Taliban's shadow governor for Chahardara District of Kundoz arrested, 21 February 2016.

([1257]) Reuters, Afghan officials say Taliban driven back in Kunduz fighting, 16 April 2016.

([1258]) AAN, The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Beyond Kunduz city – lessons (not taken) from the Taliban takeover, 30 January 2016.

([1259]) UNOCHA, Flash Update N°1 : Conflict in North-eastern Afghanistan, 17 April 2016.

([1260]) Tolo News, Afghan Forces Retake Taliban-Held Chahar Dara District In Kunduz, 29 April 2016.

([1261]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz: Taliban capture Qala-i-Zal district's bazaar, 20 April 2016.

([1262]) Khaama Press, 3 Taliban commanders killed in northern Kunduz province, 18 April 2016.

([1263]) Stars and Stripes, Taliban abduct dozens in Kunduz province, 31 May 2016.

([1264]) Khaama Press, Taliban kill 17 passengers after kidnapping around 185 in Kunduz, 31 May 2016.

([1265]) Tolo News, UNAMA Concerned At Spate Of Abductions, 2 June 2016.

([1266]) Khaama Press, 5 militants killed, 2 wounded in Kunduz airstrike, 10 May 2016; Khaama Press, 20 Taliban insurgents killed in Kunduz drone strike, 17 May 2016.

([1267]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz City may collapse soon, warn anxious residents, 23 August 2016.

([1268]) Tolo News, Military Operation Still Not Launched In Kundus: Officials, 23 August 2016.

reported displacement has been limited, with most IDPs moving to locations within Kunduz Province, although UNOCHA has also received reports of some IDPs moving to shelter with family in Takhar and Kabul Provinces and the Balkh provincial capital of Mazar-e-Sharif ([1269]).

UNOCHA said ([1270]):

> 'springtime 2016 in the north eastern province has been tragically filled with conflict and suffering, leading to an extraordinary displacement of more than 22,400 people in Kunduz. Civilians appear to be caught in the cross-fire between a 'spring offensive' launched by non-State actors and subsequent countermeasures put in motion by Government forces. Fleeing for their lives, 14, 000 people were forced from Kunduz City to remote areas […]. As the violence continued after mid-April, families were forced to flee and seek safety with family members and neighbors who opened their doors to offer a haven in the midst of chaos. As displacement swelled, aid agencies prioritized urgent humanitarian assistance to the 7,000 displaced people; however in many cases one of the biggest challenges is access to reaching the most vulnerable families in need'.

([1269]) UNOCHA, Flash Update N°1 : Conflict in North-eastern Afghanistan, 17 April 2016.

([1270]) UN News Centre, Nearly 1,000 Afghans fleeing their homes daily, warns UN relief wing, 17 May 2016.

2.6.3. Takhar

General description of the province

The province of Takhar (capital Taloqan) is composed of 17 districts: Baharak, Bangi, Chahab, Chal, Darqad, Dasht-e Qala, Eshkashem, Farkhar, Hazarsumuch, Khwajabahawuddin, Khwajaghar, Kalafgan, Namakab, Rostaq, Taloqan, Warsaj, Yangi Qala ([1271]) and has a largely mountainous or semi-mountainous landscape ([1272]). According to UNOCHA, the population is 983,336 ([1273]), and is divided between two main ethnic groups: Uzbeks (44 %) and Tadjiks (42 %); Pashtun tribes (10 %) and Hazaras are also present ([1274]). The mines of salt and coal are important sources of revenue for the provincial government and play a key role in creating jobs ([1275]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Takhar

Takhar is a volatile province where AGEs are present in large numbers, and it is surrounded by two other volatile provinces of Kunduz and Badakhshan ([1276]). In 2015, the Taliban expanded its territorial reach capturing many areas in the north including in Takhar Province ([1277]).

Takhar has been facing ethnic conflict for years as Uzbeks, gathered by the Uzbek mujahidin lobbying group, the Jihadi Council, are opposed to the appointment of Tajiks in key posts in the province. The main members of this council are involved in illegal activities ([1278]). The Uzbek insurgent group Jundullah, once opposed to the Taliban but close to the IMU, pledged allegiance to the Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour in August 2015. But Jundullah suspected that the Taliban revealed its positions to the security forces. Large areas of Takhar Province were under Jundullah control ([1279]). In September 2015, this group approached IS ([1280]).

The government put facilities in place for religious education in Takhar, so students would not have to go to Pakistan where they were also trained on terrorist activities at different madrassas ([1281]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Takhar Province counted 136 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1282]):

Violence targeting individuals	5
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	96
Explosions	8
Security enforcement	18
Non-conflict related incidents	7
Other incidents	2
Total security incidents	**136**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Takhar Province ([1283]):

Khwajaghar	36	Chahab	3
Darqad	31	Farkhar	3
Eshkashem	21	Dasht-e Qala	3
Yang-e Qala	12	Bangi	2
Taloqan	11	Kalafgan	2
Baharak	3	Rostaq	2

([1271]) UNOCHA, Paktya Province - Reference Map, 9 February 2014; MRRD, Takhar Provincial Profile, n.d.

([1272]) MRRD, Takhar Provincial Profile, n.d.

([1273]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1274]) Giustozzi, A. and Reuter, C., The Insurgents of the Afghan North, November 2011.

([1275]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Takhar mining revenue slumps by 300m afs, 14 February 2014.

([1276]) Khaama Press, Afghan forces retake control of Darqad district in Takhar, 10 January 2016; UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 December 2015.

([1277]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 March 2016.

([1278]) AAN, Ethnic Revolt or Mujahedin Solidarity? A look at the power shuffle in Takhar (amended), 17 July 2013.

([1279]) AAN, The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Beyond Kunduz city – lessons (not taken) from the Taleban takeover, 30 January 2016.

([1280]) AAN, The 2016 insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), 15 July 2016.

([1281]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Number of religious schools in Takhar province rises to 246, 18 February 2016.

([1282]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1283]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

Boosted by the fall of Kunduz in September 2015, the Taliban attacked many districts in the bordering Takhar Province such as Yangi, Ashkmash and Darqad ([1284]). In October 2015, the AGEs overran the **Khwajaghar** district again only three days after the ANA had regained control over it. An army general said that 80 % of the killed and captured rebels were under 18 years of age, recruited among **madrassa students**. The governor's spokesman confirmed this. But the Taliban spokesman denied the recruitment of **child soldiers** as it is in conflict with Islamic ideology to recruit 'people without beards' ([1285]).

In September 2015, the Jundullah group raised the IS flag for a few hours in Takhar and retreated before the arrival of the Taliban ([1286]).

In November 2015, the Yangi Qala district chief said that his team could not reach a village under the Taliban's control in the district where it killed three members of a family on charges that they spied for the government ([1287]).

After the earthquake in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Taliban seized the **Darqad** district in October 2015 ([1288]). ANSF retook the district and clashes between the security forces and AGEs continued in January 2016 ([1289]). During the recapture of the Darqad district in January 2016, 40 Taliban fighters surrendered to Afghan forces, 20 AGEs were killed and 12 arrested ([1290]). Thirteen suspected AGEs were arrested during separate raids in **Taloqan** ([1291]).

In February 2016, 10 AGEs and three ANA soldiers were killed in clashes in the **Khwajaghar** district ([1292]).

In March 2016, it was reported that several men had joined the Taliban after being tortured by ALP forces. According to a resident of **Darqad** district, instead of providing security to people, the ALP forces harassed them. An ALP commander was arrested because he had links with the Taliban and supplied weapons to them ([1293]).

In April 2016, the **Kunduz-Takhar highway** was reopened after a four-day blockade and 18 rebels were killed as a result of a clearing operation by security forces ([1294]).

In April and May 2016, schoolgirls were poisoned by drinking water in their classrooms in Takhar Province. These 'poison attacks' on schoolgirls occurred several times in the province in recent years, but the government has failed to identify the motive ([1295]).

On 20 April, in **Khwaja Bahauddin** district, a stray bullet from a clash between ALP and AGEs killed the headmaster of a school in front of his students ([1296]).

Also in Takhar, according to the police chief: 'the insurgents were encouraged by the government to put down their weapons and reconcile, but they betrayed and returned to their group and have been recently fighting against security forces'. Four of them were killed by security forces in May 2016. Dozens of 'reconciled Taliban insurgents', who were given monthly stipends for a period of time, joined again their comrades and were engaged in clashes alongside security forces in **Darqad**, Khwajaghar and some other districts. According to the provincial High Peace Committee head, a lack of budget allocated to paying them caused some reconciled AGEs to return to the battlefield ([1297]). In March 2016, reconciled Taliban fighters in northern Takhar Province claimed their lives were endangered by former comrades and that the government was also not committed to its promises ([1298]).

([1284]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban claim capturing 2 Takhar districts, 29 September 2015; AAN, The Fall of Kunduz: What does it tell us about strength of the post-Omar Taleban?, 30 September 2015.

([1285]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban accused of using children as soldiers in Takhar, 19 November 2015.

([1286]) AAN, The 2016 insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), 15 July 2016.

([1287]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban accused of killing 3 members of a family, 23 November 2015.

([1288]) BBC, Afghanistan-Pakistan quake: Taliban seize Darqad district, 28 October 2015.

([1289]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture parts of Takhar's Darqad district, 21 January 2016; Afghanistan Times, Darqad district of Takhar recaptured from Taliban, 10 January 2016.

([1290]) Khaama Press, 40 Taliban militants surrender to security forces in Takhar, 16 January 2016.

([1291]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 suspected terrorists detained with weapons in Takhar raids, 24 February 2016.

([1292]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 ANA soldiers among 13 dead in Takhar gun battles, 21 February 2016.

([1293]) Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP commander held over supplying arms to Taliban, 24 March 2016.

([1294]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz-Takhar highway has been reopened and 18 rebels killed as a result of a clearing operation by security force,s 23 April 2016.

([1295]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 47 Takhar girls hospitalised after suspected poison attack, 19 April 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Once again, several schoolgirls poisoned in Takhar, 14 May 2016.

([1296]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016 - Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016.

([1297]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Reconciled rebels return to battlefield in Takhar, 21 May 2016.

([1298]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Ex-rebels in Takhar complain govt left them in the lurch, 2 March 2016.

On 23 May, the director of Kunduz Justice Department was attacked by a pro-government armed group in Warsaj district ([1299]).

Abductions continued in 2016 in Takhar, mainly on highways leading to Kunduz or Badakhshan despite heavy casualties among the Taliban due to military operations in this area ([1300]).

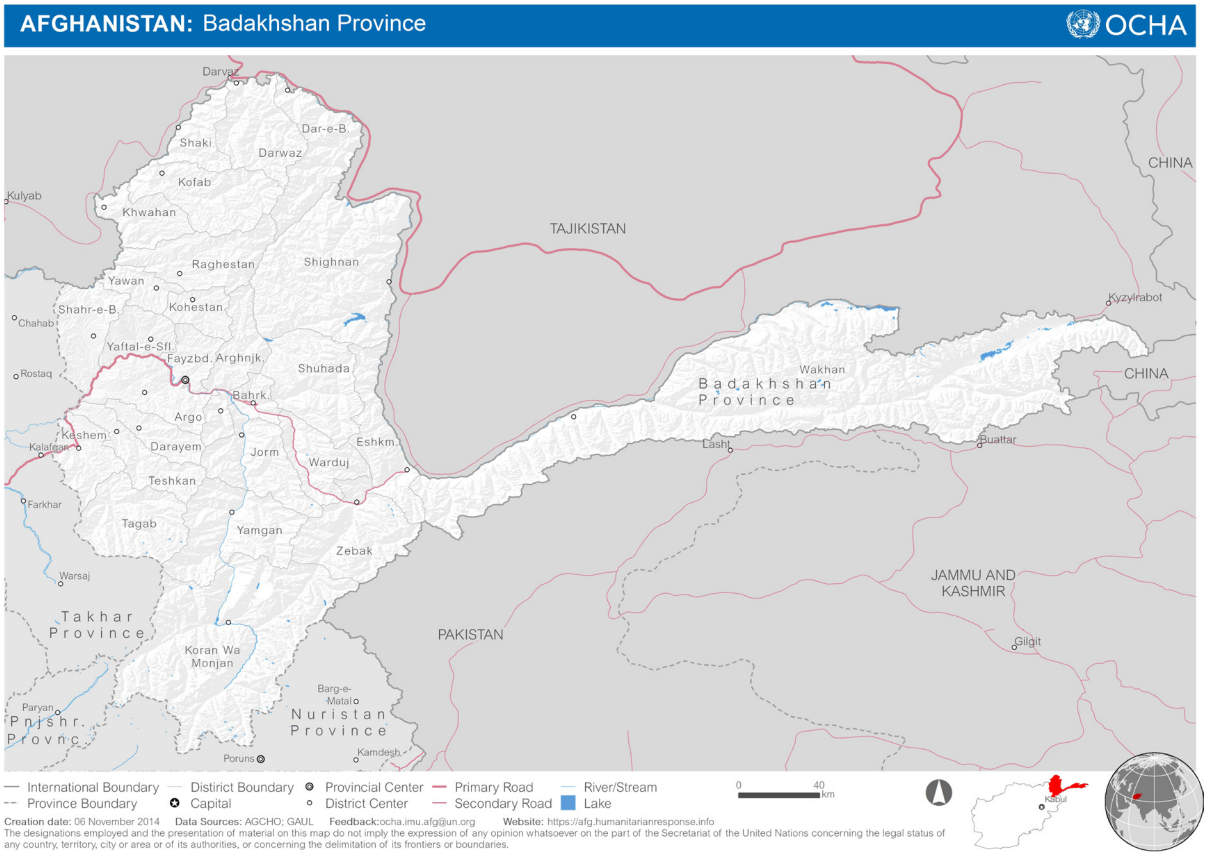
In August 2016, the Taliban reportedly blocked the road from the provincial capital Taloqan to Darqad district ([1301]).

Displacement

By the end of 2015, 6,914 families (39,025 individuals) were displaced in Takhar Province due to the conflict[1302]. By the end of April 2016, 59,000 individuals were displaced in the province ([1303]).

2.6.4. Badakhshan

General description of the province



According to UNOCHA, the population of this province is 950,953 (48.1% female and 51.9% male), composed of 77 % Tajiks, some Uzbeks and Ismailis, living mainly in rural areas ([1304]). Located in the north eastern region, Badakhshan is bordered by Takhar Province in the west and Nuristan in the south, and shares international borders with Tajikistan in the north, China in the east, and Pakistan in the south. Nearly 90% of the province is mountainous or semi mountainous terrain while one-tenth of the area is made up of flat or semi-flat land. The provincial capital is

([1299]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016 - Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016.

([1300]) Bakhtar News, Taliban Kidnap Number of Bus Passengers In Kunduz-Takhar Highway, 8 June 2016; Khaama Press, Taliban suffer heavy casualties as Afghan forces re-open Kunduz-Takhar highway, 23 April 2016.

([1301]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban block Taloqan-Darqad road against traffic, 17 August 2016.

([1302]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: conflict-induced internal displacement- 2015: the year in review, 12 April 2016.

([1303]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements – Snapshot (1 January – 30 April 2016), 15 May 2016.

([1304]) OCHA, Afghanistan: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

Fayzabad ([1305]). The province is divided into the following districts: Arghanjkhwa, Argo, Baharak, Darayem, Darwaz, DarwazeBalla, Eshkmesh, Fayzabad, Jorm, Keshem, Khash, Khwahan, Kofab, Kohestan, Koran Wa Monjan, Raghestan, ShahreBuzorg, Shaki, Shighnan, Shuhada, Tagab, Teshkan, Wakhan, Warduj, YaftaleSufla, Yawan, Yamgan, Zebak ([1306]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Badakhshan

Badakhshan, which used to be peaceful, has become disputed. It was the only province to escape the Taliban rule when it held power in Afghanistan. But in recent years the AGEs, including foreign fighters, have taken root in several districts. Their families are settled in this province. The Central Asian fighters of IMU are also largely present in the province which provides safe passage of logistical supplies from Pakistan. Smugglers pay a transit fee to traffic drugs towards bordering Tajikistan ([1307]).

Security in Badakhshan Province is threatened by different actors. It is considered to be an important region for poppy culture and a transit zone for drug trafficking ([1308]).

Many precious minerals are mined in the province which is part of the new Silk Road. The Taliban is suspected of trying to thwart Afghanistan's economic influence. According to residents, independent political analysts and journalists, MPs and government officials from the province should be blamed as they have exacerbated security problems in the province for their own political and economic gains. This lack of governance has led to clashes between security forces and AGEs, roadside bomb incidents and increasing violence by criminal organisations ([1309]).

Many districts in the province are under threat from the Taliban. The government promised in April 2016 to clear the volatile districts of AGEs. The governor of Badakhshan called on the youth, who are fighting against the government, to join the government and 'restrain implementing wrong policies of Pakistan in Afghanistan' ([1310]). In May 2016, the Afghan Foreign Minister confirmed the presence of foreign rebels in the province ([1311]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Badakhshan Province counted 109 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1312]):

Violence targeting individuals	10
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	86
Explosions	3
Security enforcement	7
Non-conflict related incidents	2
Other incidents	1
Total security incidents	**109**

([1305]) MRRD, Badakhshan Provincial Profile, n.d.

([1306]) OCHA, Afghanistan: Badakhshan Province – District Atlas, April 2014.

([1307]) AAN, The 2015 Insurgency in the North (2): Badakhshan's Jurm district under siege, 14 September 2015.

([1308]) AREU, Evolving Terrain: Opium Poppy Cultivation in Balkh and Badakhshan Provinces in 2013, April 2014.

([1309]) Tolo News, Badakhshan Residents Blame Government, MPs for Deteriorating Security, 14 May 2015.

([1310]) Tolo News, Badakhshan Provincial Council Concerned over Spike in Insurgency, 30 April 2016.

([1311]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Presence of foreign rebels in Badakhshan a big concern: Rabbani, 5 May 2016.

([1312]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Badakhshan province ([1313]):

Baharak	19	Teshkan	4
Jorm	16	Kohestan	3
Tagab	13	Shuhada	3
Raghestan	10	Khash	2
Warduj	10	Keshem	1
Yaftal-e Sufla	8	Kwahan	1
Yamgan	6	Yawan	1
Fayzabad	6	Wakhan	1
Argo	5		

In October 2015, the Taliban spokesman claimed that AGEs killed 50 soldiers and captured 28 checkpoints in Badakhshan Province. The governor of Badakhshan, appointed in October 2015 ([1314]), said that a Taliban commander acting as a "shadow governor" of the province was killed in an airstrike ([1315]).

In the same month, security forces arrested 12 AGEs, including seven underage fighters in Badakhshan where the use of child soldiers is a common practice by AGEs. The **Warduj** and **Baharak** districts, which have fallen a few times to the Taliban, were reportedly once again taken by security forces in October 2015 ([1316]).

In November 2015, the **Yamgan** district fell to the Taliban who captured and tortured some government servants. The AGEs claimed they killed 14 security officials during clashes. One tank, two vehicles and other military gear were seized. They acknowledged the loss of six Taliban in clashes ([1317]). A few days later, an official said that at least 28 Taliban, including six foreigners, were killed in some villages of the **Yamgan** district. He said that about 180 foreign fighters, including Uzbek, Pakistani and Tajik nationals, had been fighting against security forces. The governor of Badakhshan said that 350 foreign AGEs were active in the Dara-I Khustak locality of **Jorm** district ([1318]). During clashes in Yamgan, AGEs used military tanks and heavy weapons they had taken from security forces ([1319]).

In December 2015, three foreign AGEs and one Afghan militant were killed by their explosives in the Warduj district, which had fallen to Taliban, when they were planting a roadside bomb ([1320]).

In 2015, 29 violent incidents against **women** occurred in Badakhshan, especially in Warduj, Koran wa Monjan, Yamgan, Jorm and other remote areas. Some of these women were killed by AGEs. The husband of one victim was serving in the ALP ([1321]).

In January 2016, the Taliban was driven out of the **Tagab** district after a two-day military operation. Fifteen Taliban members were killed and 20 others wounded. AGEs then fled to Yamgan and **Teshkan** districts ([1322]). During this period, the situation deteriorated in **Warduj** district; after the fall of the district to AGEs, about 700 government officials fled to Baharak district. In the Warduj district, most shops were closed and business stopped. Therefore, due to poverty, people allowed their children to join AGEs. These children were paid monthly stipends and trained in military techniques. 70 % of them were used as fighters in areas where the Taliban, particularly foreign AGEs, were in full control ([1323]).

([1313]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1314]) Afghan Biographies, Begzad, Ahmad Faisal, 15 November 2015.

([1315]) RT, Taliban push on, seizing strategic hubs & key roads across Afghanistan, 4 October 2015.

([1316]) Tolo News, Officials Arrest Seven Alleged Child Soldiers in Badakhshan, 18 October 2015.

([1317]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Yamgan district of Badakhshan falls to Taliban, 19 November 2015.

([1318]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreigners among 28 militants killed in Badakhshan clashes, 21 November 2015.

([1319]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Intelligence officer among 11 killed in Badakhshan fighting, 18 November 2015.

([1320]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 foreign rebels blown up by own explosives in Badakhshan, 25 December 2015.

([1321]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Many crimes against women go unreported in Badakhshan, 26 December 2015.

([1322]) Khaama Press, Taliban driven out of Badakhshan's Tagab District, 26 January 2016.

([1323]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban recruit hundreds of children in Badakhshan, 5 January 2016.

In February 2016, three women and two men, suspected to be agents of Pakistan's intelligence service ISI, were arrested in Badakhshan by the NDS and the police ([1324]). In the same month, many AGEs, including foreigners, were killed in separate security incidents in Badakhshan ([1325]). Twenty-five Taliban surrendered to government forces ([1326]).

Council members from Badakhshan Province said that the commander of an illegal armed group and his men were illegally extracting lapis lazuli ([1327]) from a local mine. The commander had brought two Taliban commanders to the district and half of the mine's profits was used to support the Taliban. The government was blamed for its failure to ensure the security of mines; also, elements inside the government were supporting mine smugglers ([1328]).

In March 2016, heavy clashes took place in **Baharak** district ([1329]). A large number of AGEs were equipped with heavy and light weapons. Five Taliban were killed, 10 wounded and four arrested ([1330]).

On 20 June, a remote controlled-IED detonated by AGEs killed 12 civilians, including two girls and three boys, and injured 36 others, including 14 children in Keshem district ([1331]).

In June 2016, Afghan security forces seized at least 65 trucks of lapis lazuli illegally extracted from a mine in northeastern Badakhshan Province. This occurred as the Global Witness in its report said the illegal mining of the minerals also funneled millions of dollars into the hands of corrupt warlords besides fuelling the conflict in the country. A Ministry of Mines and Petroleum spokesman said: 'the government will pave the way for the legal extraction of lapis lazuli in Badakhshan once the security situation improves' ([1332]).

In August 2016, ANSF conducted operations and the Afghan Air Force executed airstrikes against AGEs' positions in Raghistan district. This happened after the latter had cut off communication networks in the area ([1333]).

Displacement

Besides displacements due to the abovementioned natural disasters, Badakhshan has experienced significant conflict-induced displacements, especially after the October 2015 clashes in Kunduz ([1334]). According to UNOCHA, about 27,000 persons were displaced as of May 2016 in Badakhshan ([1335]).

([1324]) Khaama Press, Five ISI agents arrested in Badakhshan, 7 February 2016.

([1325]) Khaama Press, Foreigners among 24 terrorists killed in Badakhshan, 18 February 2016.

([1326]) Khaama Press, 25 Taliban militants give up fighting in Badakhshan province, 4 February 2016.

([1327]) A deep blue semi-precious stone.

([1328]) Tolo News, Lawmakers Concerned over Illegal Extraction of Mines in Badakhshan, 8 February 2016.

([1329]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Heavy clashes in Badakhshan's Baharak district underway, 2 March 2016.

([1330]) Kaama Press, Security forces rebuff Taliban attack in Badakhshan's Baharak district, 3 March 2016.

([1331]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Midyear Report 2016 - Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016.

([1332]) Khaama Press, 65 trucks of illegally extracted Lapis Lazuli seized by Afghan forces, 9 June 2016.

([1333]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 26 rebels eliminated in Badakhshan airstrikes, 9 August 2016.

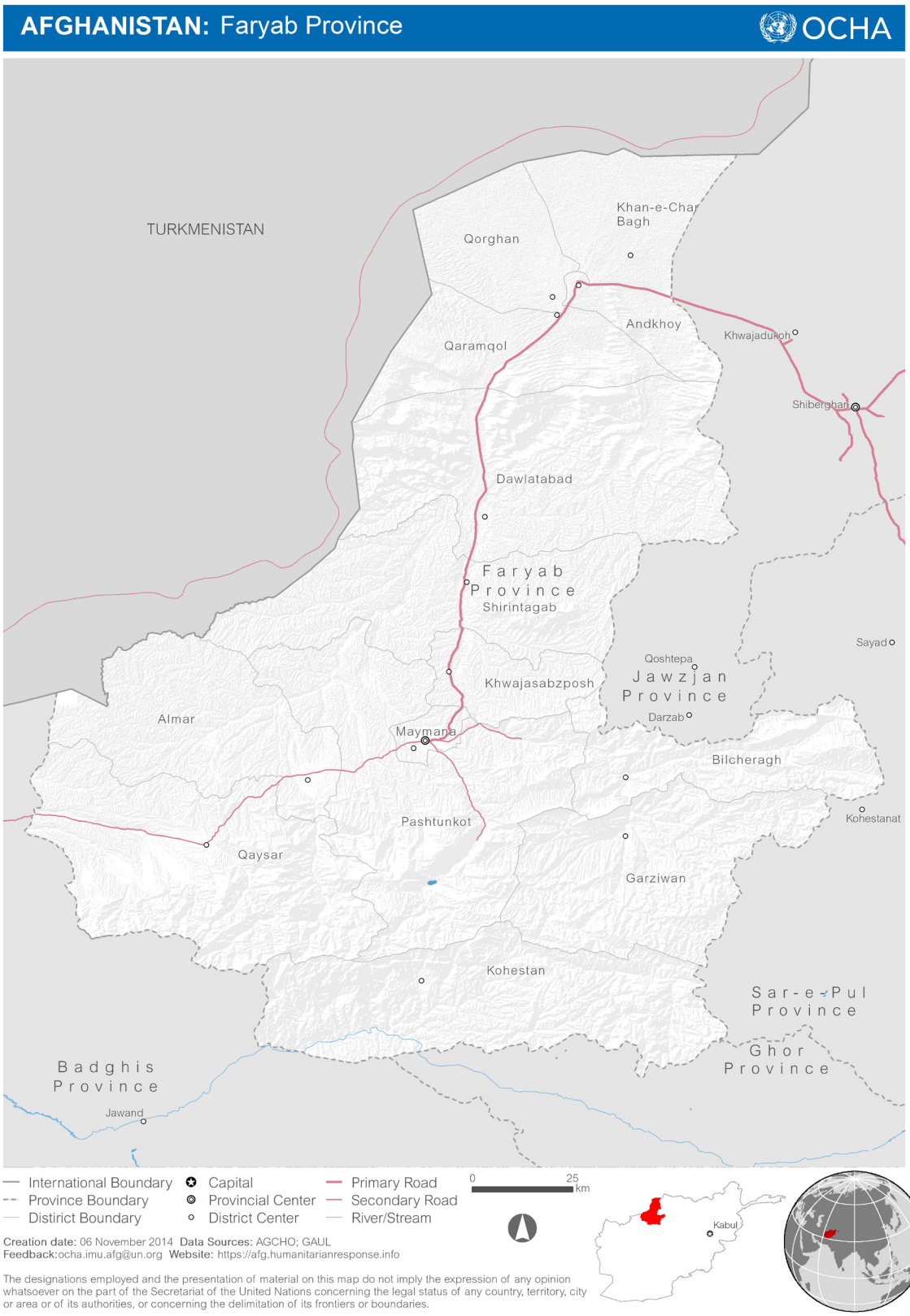
([1334]) UNHCR, Major situations of conflict-induced displacement in the first months of 2016 - Summary note for Afghanistan Protection Cluster, 24 February 2016.

([1335]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements – Snapshot (1 January – 30 April 2016), 15 May 2016.

2.7. North

2.7.1. Faryab

General description of the province



Faryab is situated in the western end of the northern region of Afghanistan, bordering Turkmenistan to the west and north, Jawzjan and Sar-e Pul to the east, Ghor to the south and Badghis in the southwest. The provincial capital is Maymana. The province is comprised of the following districts: Almar, Andkhoy, Bilcheragh, Dawlatabad, Garziwan, KhaneChar Bagh, Khwajasabzposh, Kohestan, Maymana, Pashtunkot, Qaramqol, Qaysar, Qorghan, Shirintagab ([1336]). The terrain of the province ranges from the Hindu Kush mountains of southern Faryab to the desert flatlands of northern Faryab. The ring road passes through the majority of district centres of Faryab, connecting Maymana to other cities of the northern region such as Mazare Sharif. Construction on the connection with Herat through Badghis has stalled ([1337]). The road between Maymana and Shiberghan in Jawzjan is intermittently closed due to insurgent activities ([1338]).

The population of the province is estimated to be 998,147, and for Maymana approximately 84,098 ([1339]). According to UNAMA figures cited in a Norwegian report, Faryab is the only Afghan province with an ethnic Uzbek majority and therefore holds symbolic national significance for this Afghan minority. Tajiks are the second-largest group, followed by Pashtuns then Turkmens, while there is a minor Hazara presence ([1340]). Shakh but also Nawabad, Khwaja Kandu, Konjak, Chahar Shanba, Ashab Kaf, Faiz Nawa and Qabchin are said to be Pashtun-dominated areas ([1341]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Faryab

In May 2014, Obaid Ali considered the province the Taliban's gateway to the north ([1342]). According to a source in Kabul, since 2014 the security situation indicated that the province had passed the 'tipping point' into a vicious cycle of security threats, consistent attacks on security forces, inaccessibility of government actors and eventual inaccessibility of nongovernment development actors, increased frustrations of local communities, which exacerbated security problems ([1343]). Graeme Smith from ICG described the situation as deteriorating rapidly after the withdrawal of IMF. The Taliban reportedly deliberately chose the 'hard approach' for Faryab ([1344]). In July 2015, hundreds of Taliban fighters arrived in the province from Badghis, Ghor, Sar-e Pul and Jawzjan provinces with foreign fighters and attacked dozens of villages in the districts of Qaysar, Almar and Pashtun Kot ([1345]). The Taliban is reportedly recruiting among the Uzbek community in Faryab ([1346]) and, according to the *New York Times*, in August 2015 there were 3,000 local fighters in Faryab ([1347]).

According to locals, since 2015 government control has been limited to district centres ([1348]) and Faryab has been partially controlled by Taliban ([1349]) with the constant shifting of fronts due to clashes with ANSF ([1350]) and pro-government forces led by Vice President General Abdul Rashid Dostum in August 2015 ([1351]). For example, Qaysar district was the scene of fierce battles between ANSF and the Taliban, resulting in shifting control over areas. After military sweeps by Dostum's forces, the Taliban often easily regained influence over areas that had been under its control several years previously ([1352]).

([1336]) Humanitarian Response, AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012.

([1337]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign militants pose serious threat to Faryab security: PC, 2 June 2015.

([1338]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Rebel leader injured, 3 killed in Faryab incidents, 15 March 2015.

([1339]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1340]) Bauck P., a.o., An Assessment of Conflict and Actors in Faryab Province to Establish a Basis for Increased Norwegian Civilian Involvement, Chr. Michelsen Institute, July 2007.

([1341]) Pajhwok Afghan News, So-called vigilantes unleash hell on Qaysar residents, 24 August 2015.

([1342]) Ali, O., Moving East in the North: transitioned Faryab and the Taleban, 17 May 2014.

([1343]) International organisation, e-mail, 26 October 2014. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([1344]) ICG, Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition, 12 May 2014, pp. 10-11.

([1345]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Faryab districts under attack from rebels, 5 July 2015.

([1346]) ICG, Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition, 12 May 2014, p. 14.

([1347]) NY Times, Afghan Vice President Raises Concerns After Turning to Militias in Taliban Fight, 18 August 2015.

([1348]) RFE/RL, Afghan MP says Taliban 'very much at ease' in Faryab province, 15 April 2015.

([1349]) Jamestown Foundation (The), Resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan's North, 1 April 2016; RFE/RL, Return of militias To Afghan front lines sparks allegations of abuses, 5 September 2015.

([1350]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, September 2015, p. 4.; Jamestown Foundation (The), Resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan's North, 1 April 2016.

([1351]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Dostum trip to boost security forces' morale in Faryab, 3 August 2015; NY Times, Afghan Vice President Raises Concerns After Turning to Militias in Taliban Fight, 18 August 2015; RFE/RL, Afghan Vice President vows to 'Clear' Northern Province of Militants, 20 August 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban recapture Faryab's Astana baba area, 27 August 2015; Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban overrun more areas in Faryab, 6 September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban recapture 3 areas of Qaisar district, 1 September 2015.

([1352]) Pajhwok Afghan News, *Taliban recapture 3 areas of Qaisar district*, 1st September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban overrun more areas in Faryab, 6 September 2015.

Insurgent groups in Faryab also include IMU ([1353]) and they are regularly believed to recruit foreign nationals, such as Pakistanis, Uzbeks, Uighurs, Tajiks, Arabs ([1354]) and Turkmens ([1355]). According to the *New York Times* there are 'about 3,000 local fighters, aided by about 500 foreign militants, largely from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which pledged loyalty this year to the Islamic State' ([1356]). IS has been present in Faryab since March 2015 ([1357]) and has even appointed recruiters ([1358]).

According to a source in Kabul, the Junbeshe Melli party, led by ethnic Uzbek General Dostum, established its dominance within the province and retained strong political influence. There is a strong rivalry with Jamiate Islami. The province has long been the ground for factional conflict, in recent years fueled by the remobilisation of former commanders in the ALP and its predecessor the CIP ([1359]). Besides ALP, some 382 disbanded CIP members were, according to a source in Kabul, still operational in Bilchiragh and Dawlatabad districts in 2014 ([1360]). According to a report by ICG, some of these men joined the ALP, others became 'freelance warlords'. Because of the ties these militias have with political parties such as Junbesh or Jamiat they enjoy a degree of impunity ([1361]). ALP members and pro-government militias' members are estimated as 22,000 and accused of selling arms and ammunition to AGEs. Within the ANP, according to the Kabul Bank, 6,000 policemen receive a salary from the Afghan state but only 3,629 can be affectively counted – the rest are considered 'ghosts' ([1362]). There are also armed progovernment militia in Faryab, in Almar and Qaysar districts ([1363]). In 2015, UNAMA stated that they were involved in abuses and civilian casualties especially in the north and northeast, mainly Kunduz and Faryab ([1364]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Faryab Province counted 771 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1365]):

Violence targeting individuals	99
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	502
Explosions	81
Security enforcement	76
Non-conflict related incidents	12
Other incidents	1
Total security incidents	**771**

([1353]) BBC, Afghan suicide bombing at market leaves many dead, 18 March 2014; NY Times, Afghan Vice President Raises Concerns After Turning to Militias in Taliban Fight, 18 August 2015; RFE/RL, The Islamic Movement Of Uzbekistan Comes Unraveled, 28 November 2015.

([1354]) Khaama Press, Pakistani militants among 200 killed or injured in Farah operations, 25 May 2014; Tolo News, Hundreds of insurgents attack district of Faryab, 24 August 2014; Pajhwok Afghan News, 75 rebels killed in Faryab offensive, 28 August 2014.

([1355]) RFE/RL, Who Do Turkmen Authorities Think They Are Fooling?, 20 October 2015.

([1356]) NY Times, Afghan Vice President Raises Concerns After Turning to Militias in Taliban Fight, 18 August 2015.

([1357]) Jamestown Foundation (The), Resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan's North, 1 April 2016.

([1358]) USIP, The Islamic State in Afghanistan: Assessing the Threat, 7 April 2016, p. 2.

([1359]) International organisation, e-mail, 26 October 2014. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([1360]) International organisation, e-mail, 26 October 2014. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([1361]) ICG, Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition, 12 May 2014, p. 11; Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilian murder sparks protest in Faryab, 1 June 2014.

([1362]) RFE/RL, Police and militia corruption aids taliban in dangerous Afghan province, 19 January 2016.

([1363]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 65.

([1364]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2014. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2015, p. 85; UNAMA, Afghanistan. Midyear Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2015, pp. 73-77.

([1365]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Faryab Province ([1366]):

Qaysar	127	Kohestan	38
Pashtunkot	117	Garziwan	38
Almar	108	Bilcheragh	18
Shirintagab	90	Andkhoy	8
Khwajasabzposh	88	Qaramqol	8
Dawlatabad	81	Qorghan	5
Maymana	42	Khan-e Char Bagh	4

According to UNAMA, three health facilities were attacked during 2015 ([1367]).

According to ISW, the situation has not changed from December 2015 to June 2016 concerning Taliban presence in Faryab Province, besides Khwajahsabzposh district which since June 2016 is considered a 'high Taliban support zone' and was part of the 'low confidence Taliban support zone' in the previous maps. Since December 2015, northern districts such as Khan-e Char Bagh, Andkhoy, Qaramqol, Qorghan and eastern part of Bilcheragh district were assessed as 'low confidence Taliban support zones'; all the remaining districts were evaluated as 'high confidence Taliban support zones' or zones controlled by the AGEs. The Taliban thus controls a zone that includes: the east of Khwajahsabzposh district, areas in Bilcheragh district, areas in the western part of Garziwan district, an area of Pashtunkot, and a wide area in Qaysar district ([1368]).

Several incidents causing civilian casualties were reported on Faryab's roads or highways, including armed attacks on vehicles ([1369]), violent robberies of passengers ([1370]) and mass abductions ([1371]). In January 2016, more than 20 buses were stopped on Maymana-Khawajasabzposh road ([1372]).

UNAMA reported in its 2016 mid-year report that pro-government armed groups clashes caused 24 civilian casualties in Faryab ([1373]). For example, 3 civilians were killed and 12 injured on 17 May 2016 after fighting between 2 PGMs ([1374]). In August 2016, RFE/RL reported again on militias threatening inhabitants of Faryab. The main problem was extortion but also civilian killings were reported ([1375]).

On 4 October 2015, the Taliban attempted to capture the provincial capital **Maymana**. The provincial council head was worried about the security of his city: 'Despite suffering casualties in Garziwan and Pashtunkot, Taliban might storm Maimana… if the government does not reinforce security personnel' ([1376]). Although it could not seize the city in October, the Taliban targeted bomb attacks against police vehicles which caused civilian casualties ([1377]). In November 2015, a man was kidnapped in the city and as his family could not purchase the AK- 47 requested by AGEs to secure his release, he was shot ([1378]). In February 2016, for the third time of the Afghan solar year a bomb exploded in front of the Azizi Bank branch in the morning killing 2 civilians and injuring 12 people ([1379]). In March 2016, demonstrations were organised by Vice President General Dostum's supporters to protest about the damages of their leader's billboards in Mazar-e Sharif. Some people were injured during the violence which broke out with

([1366]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1367]) UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key trends and incidents affecting children's access to healthcare and education in Afghanistan, April 2016, p. 7.

([1368]) ISW, Afghanistan Threat Assessment: The Taliban and ISIS, 10 December 2015; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 23 February 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016.

([1369]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 student killed, 4 injured in Faryab gun attack, 17 September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 civilians killed, 10 injured in Faryab, Jawzjan blasts, 24 December 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Insurgents put to death 2 kidnapped passengers in Faryab, 26 February 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, Militants seize dozens of passengers in Faryab, 13 April 2016.

([1370]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Dacoits rob Faryab passengers of cash, valuables, 14 January 2016.

([1371]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 including 2 education officials kidnapped in Faryab, 28 December 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban free 108 of 110 kidnapped passengers in Faryab, 7 February 2016.

([1372]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Dacoits rob Faryab passengers of cash, valuables, 14 January 2016.

([1373]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Midyear report 2016. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 86.

([1374]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Midyear report 2016. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 87.

([1375]) RFE/RL, Problems With Paramilitaries In Afghanistan's Faryab Province, 6 August 2016.

([1376]) RFE/RL, Revisions To Turkmenistan's Neutrality Policy, 12 October 2015.

([1377]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 people wounded in Faryab explosion, 27 October 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Children among 15 civilians injured in Maimana explosion, 19 May 2016.

([1378]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 61.

([1379]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Maimana explosion claims 2 lives, leaves a dozen injured, 17 February 2016.

Balkh Province Governor Atta Mohammad Noor's supporters ([1380]). In July 2016, a girl studying at the university was killed by poison in Maimana ([1381]). In August 2016, a bomb strapped to the back of a donkey detonated in Maimana City, injuring one police officer and a civilian ([1382]).

In September 2015, residents of **Qaysar** district complained to RFE/RL about the brutal behaviour of Vice President General Dostum's armed forces during the August 2015 operation ([1383]). During this month the Taliban regained control of Ghora area in this district and clashes were reported in Kata wa Lang area ([1384]). In another area of this district in the same month a 12-year-old boy suspected of collaborating with the government was killed by the Taliban ([1385]). In October 2015, heavy clashes were again reported in this district which caused the suspension of electricity supply and the rise of oil and gas prices ([1386]). Another operation was conducted in order to reopen the Qaysar-Ghormach (Badghis province) highway which was mined by AGEs. Casualties among AGEs and ANSF were reported ([1387]). In December 2015, a clash between AGEs and ANSF occurred in Konjak ([1388]). In January 2016, the explosion of an unexploded mortar shell injured 7 children ([1389]), two policemen were killed on the Qaysar-Ghormach highway ([1390]) and the Taliban took control of 12 villages. These were retaken by ALP with the aid of the public in February 2016 ([1391]). Also in February 2016, one civilian was killed and one other wounded when their motorbike hit a roadside bomb ([1392]). In the following month a mother and her two children were wounded when a grenade exploded ([1393]). In July 2016, an 18-year-old girl was stabbed to death in her home in Qaysar district ([1394]).

In September 2015, a resident of **Pashtunkot** district complained to RFE/RL about the brutal behaviour of Vice President General Dostum's armed forces during the August 2015 operation. Specifically, the kidnapping of women was mentioned ([1395]). Between October and November 2015, clashes occurred in Pashtunkot district between ANSF and the Taliban ([1396]) after the latter had taken control of more areas of the district in October ([1397]). For example, Kata Qala, Nadirabad and Khesht Pul were under the Taliban's control before a clearing operation in November 2015 and the AGEs set up checkpoints in order to extort money from people and vehicles ([1398]). In November 2015, 60 members of an uprising group defected to the Taliban ([1399]), an army helicopter had to make an emergency landing after it was attacked by the Taliban and people on board were abducted ([1400]); four children were wounded and one was killed when an IED they were playing with exploded in the Kala Shakh area. According to an uprising commander this happened at a security post where children were sent by the Taliban ([1401]). By the end of February 2016, heavy clashes as a result of a clearing operation caused the displacement of hundreds of families, casualties and killing between fighting parties ([1402]). The same month a woman accused of adultery was lashed by the Taliban in Khwaja Musa area ([1403]). In May 2016, the Taliban coordinated attacks against police checkposts in Kala Kalaan

([1380]) RFE/RL, Deadly Clashes In North Afghanistan Over Torn-Down Posters, 24 March 2016.

([1381]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Teenage girl found stabled to death in Faryab, 31 July 2016.

([1382]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Donkey bomb blast leaves 2 injured in Faryab, 31 August 2016.

([1383]) RFE/RL, Return of militias To Afghan front lines sparks allegations of abuses, 5 September 2015.

([1384]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban overrun more areas in Faryab, 6 September 2015.

([1385]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban overrun more areas in Faryab, 6 September 2015.

([1386]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's deputy governor for Faryab killed, 21 October 2015.

([1387]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Nearly a dozen rebels dead in Qaisar, Ghormach operations, 21 October 2015.

([1388]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban, security personnel suffer casualties in Faryab clashes, 5 December 2015.

([1389]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 children wounded in Faryab mortar shell explosion, 3 January 2016.

([1390]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 policemen dead in Faryab, Badakhshan attacks, 7 January 2016.

([1391]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 villages of Qaisar district retaken from insurgents, 11 February 2016.

([1392]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilian killed, intelligence agents among 3 wounded, 10 February 2016.

([1393]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Child killed, uprising leader among 5 injured in Faryab, 21 March 2016.

([1394]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Teenage girl found stabled to death in Faryab, 31 July 2016.

([1395]) RFE/RL, Return of militias To Afghan front lines sparks allegations of abuses, 5 September 2015.

([1396]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Commander among 6 Taliban killed in Faryab clash, 9 October 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 Afghan soldiers, 4 insurgents dead in battles, 30 November 2015.

([1397]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Despite casualties, Taliban overrun more areas in Faryab, 8 October 2015.

([1398]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 Afghan soldiers, 4 insurgents dead in battles, 30 November 2015.

([1399]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 militiamen killed, 60 defect to Taliban in Faryab, 15 November 2015.

([1400]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban attack ANA copter after emergency landing in Faryab, 24 November 2015.

([1401]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Child among 3 dead in Faryab explosion, clash, 22 November 2015.

([1402]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's shadow district chief among 6 killed in Faryab, 28 February 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 28 more Taliban eliminated in Dostum-led Faryab offensive, 29 February 2016.

([1403]) Pajhwok Afghan News, AIHRC slams lashing of woman, wants perpetrators punished, 10 February 2016.

village ([1404]), security posts of uprising members in Gilimbaf area ([1405]) and took 30 people hostage including children; the AGEs also killed 6 civilians in retaliation for the killing of one of their commanders and their fighters by uprising groups ([1406]). In July 2016, a Taliban force of about 1,500 fighters attacked and seized the strategic Thilan area of Pashtunkot ([1407]). In August, ANSF and PGMs recaptured the area but shortly afterwards the Taliban staged another attack with more than 1,000 fighters with motorcycles, Humvees and other vehicles. This forced the ANSF and PGM to flee their bases in the area again ([1408]).

In **Almar** district in September 2015, Khwaja Gawhar bazaar was attacked by the Taliban after border policemen abandoned it ([1409]). In December 2015, a roadside bomb killed two people and wounded a third person ([1410]).

In **Shirintagab** district, in September 2015, an uprising leader and his friend were killed in a suicide attack which also injured three other people ([1411]). In December 2015, the Taliban tried to take control of the district centre ([1412]) and a Koh Sayyad area police post was attacked in December 2015 causing deaths and casualties on both sides ([1413]). In March 2016, in the same area, a policeman was targeted by a remote-controlled bomb ([1414]) and an ALP official was killed in an ambush ([1415]). In May 2016, security checkpoints were attacked by the Taliban ([1416]) and two representatives of people with disabilities were abducted and killed ([1417]). In June 2016, the Taliban stated on its website that Vice president General Dostum's militia looted shops and houses, kidnapped more than 70 elders and stole cattle and civilians' belongings in Shiringtagab district ([1418]).

In **Khwajasabzposh** district, in September 2015, the Taliban fired at a students' vehicle ([1419]). In December 2015, a roadside bomb was detonated against a vehicle causing death and injuries ([1420]). In December 2015, five people were abducted on the highway, three of them were released and the two others, Ministry of Education's employees should have been released if they did not have 'political affiliation', according to the Pashtunkot Taliban commander ([1421]). In February 2016, more than 50 passengers of a bus and private cars were abducted by the Taliban; fifty one of them were soon released but two of them, members of ANA, were killed ([1422]). In April 2016, a security checkpoint was attacked in Sahrai Qala area ([1423]). In May 2016, at least 12 people were killed and 18 injured after clashes between Jamiat and Junbish parties ([1424]).

In January 2016, in the Khairabad area of **Dawlatabad** district, a police patrol was attacked ([1425]). In April 2016, 300 Taliban members tried to take control of the district's headquarters ([1426]). The following month, a former mayor was killed by a magnetic bomb placed on his vehicle ([1427]). In July 2016, security forces and militias led by Dostum reportedly arrested 81 civilians in Dawlatabad. In house-to-house search operations nine civilians were killed and security and militia men looted the homes ([1428]).

([1404]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab: Ex-mayor killed in blast, 2 ANA troops die in mishap, 9 May 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 ALP personnel among 15 killed in separate attacks, 10 May 2016.

([1405]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 Taliban militants killed in Faryab, Ghor clashes, 15 May 2016.

([1406]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill 6 civilians, hold 30 hostage in Faryab, 16 May 2016.

([1407]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture Faryab village after overpowering uprising forces, 22 July 2016.

([1408]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab's Tilan area again falls after massive rebel raid, 22 August 2016.

([1409]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban overrun more areas in Faryab, 6 September 2015.

([1410]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 civilians killed, 10 injured in Faryab, Jawzjan blasts, 24 December 2015.

([1411]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Anti-Taliban militia leader killed in Faryab suicide attack, 27 September 2015.

([1412]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 Taliban killed, power supply snapped in Faryab fighting, 29 December 2015.

([1413]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Taliban militants, 2 police killed in Faryab firefight, 21 December 2015.

([1414]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Child killed, uprising leader among 5 injured in Faryab, 21 March 2016.

([1415]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 dead in Faryab traffic accident, Taliban attacks, 17 March 2016.

([1416]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 Taliban militants killed in Faryab, Ghor clashes, 15 May 2016.

([1417]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Special people's representative shot dead in Faryab, 19 May 2016.

([1418]) Voice of Jihad, Dostum militia burn dozens of homes in Faryab, abduct more than 70, 28 June 2016.

([1419]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 student killed, 4 injured in Faryab gun attack, 17 September 2015.

([1420]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 civilians killed, 10 injured in Faryab, Jawzjan blasts, 24 December 2015.

([1421]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 including 2 education officials kidnapped in Faryab, 28 December 2015.

([1422]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Insurgents put to death 2 kidnapped passengers in Faryab, 26 February 2016.

([1423]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 rebels, 2 tribal militiamen killed in Ghazni, Faryab, 21 April 2016.

([1424]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 killed, 18 wounded in Jamiat-Junbish clashes in Faryab, 19 May 2016.

([1425]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban key commander killed in Faryab, 22 January 2016.

([1426]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 rebels eliminated, Taliban repulsed in Faryab, 1 April 2016.

([1427]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab: Ex-mayor killed in blast, 2 ANA troops die in mishap, 9 May 2016.

([1428]) Pajhwok Afghan News, '9 civilians killed, houses plundered in Dostum-led offensive', 2 July 2016.

In **Garziwan** district, in September 2015, two residents including a local policeman's father were killed by the Taliban ([1429]). By the end of the first week of October 2015, Garziwan district was easily captured by the Taliban as security forces were said to have 'tactically vacated the areas' ([1430]). In April 2016, clearing operations were undertaken in Jar Kala area with consequent clashes between policemen along with uprising groups against Taliban which caused casualties in both sides ([1431]). During these clashes '[civilians] could not come out of their houses as Taliban use the residential areas as their trenches and don't allow people to leave the area' ([1432]).

In **Bilcheragh** district, a clash between illegal commanders was reported in November 2015 ([1433]).

In **Qaramqol** district, bordering Turkmenistan, in February 2016, 110 passengers were kidnapped in the Mirza Quam area. All except four of them were released ([1434]). A border policeman was killed after being abducted by the Taliban in March 2016 ([1435]). A police patrol was attacked in Khan-e Char Bagh district in January 2016 ([1436]). Three months later about 60 travellers were abducted in Mirza Qam area of this district and then released ([1437]).

In December 2015, in **Andkhoy** district, a former Jumbesh-e Milli islami commander was targeted by a bomb in the district centre. Two civilians were killed and 14 people were injured ([1438]).

Pajhwok Afghan News also reported that 5 clinic employees in **Kohestan** were abducted in October 2015 ([1439]).

Displacements

From September 2015 to December 2015, Faryab was among the top Afghan provinces from where people were displaced. In September 2015, 570 families (3,664 people) who took refuge mainly in Maymana were assessed ([1440]). These families, mainly from Almar and Qaysar district, left their homes because of 'harassment and intimidations by non-State Armed Groups' ([1441]) and 'the presence of ANA and ANP bases close to their village. The frequent attacks against these military installations worsened the risks for the civilian population, who was often caught in the exchanges of fire' ([1442]).

In October 2015, 417 families (2,626 people) were assessed as IDPs in the provincial capital. These families decided to quit Qaysar, Almar, Shiringtabag, Pashtunkot and Khwajasabzposh districts because of 'general insecurity, conflicts between ANSF and AGEs as well as frequent attacks on ANA bases by AGEs, which in turn created heightened security and safety risks for the civilian population' ([1443]).

In November 2015, there was a decrease of IDPs with 183 families (1,210 people) assessed by the UNHCR ([1444]). For 2015, UNHCR concluded that 'Faryab province emerged as one of the most volatile areas in Afghanistan. Displacement was generally confined to the provincial territory, particularly to the city of Maymana and the surrounding areas' ([1445]) with a total of 3,411 displaced families ([1446]).

From January to April 2016, 6,800 IDPs were reported in Faryab, more than half of all the IDPs in the northern region ([1447]).

([1429]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Woman among 6 killed in Faryab, Jawzjan clashes, 2 September 2015.

([1430]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Despite casualties, Taliban overrun more areas in Faryab, 8 October 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab's Gorzaiwan district falls to Taliban, 8 October 2015.

([1431]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Balcheragh police chief killed during Faryab clash, 16 April 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 rebels, 2 tribal militiamen killed in Ghazni, Faryab, 21 April 2016.

([1432]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 Taliban fighters eliminated in Faryab, claim officials, 27 April 2016.

([1433]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Child among 3 dead in Faryab explosion, clash, 22 November 2015.

([1434]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban free 108 of 110 kidnapped passengers in Faryab, 7 February 2016.

([1435]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 dead in Faryab traffic accident, Taliban attacks, 17 March 2016.

([1436]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 militants, police driver killed in Faryab clash, 29 January 2016.

([1437]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Militants seize dozens of passengers in Faryab, 13 April 2016; Jamestown Foundation (The), Resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan's North, 1 April 2016.

([1438]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 civilians killed, 15 wounded in Faryab blast, 19 October 2015.

([1439]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 health workers kidnapped in Faryab's Kohistan district, 25 October 2015.

([1440]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, October 2015, p. 2.

([1441]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, September 2015, p. 4.

([1442]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, September 2015, pp. 4-5.

([1443]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, October 2015, p. 5.

([1444]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, November 2015, p. 2.

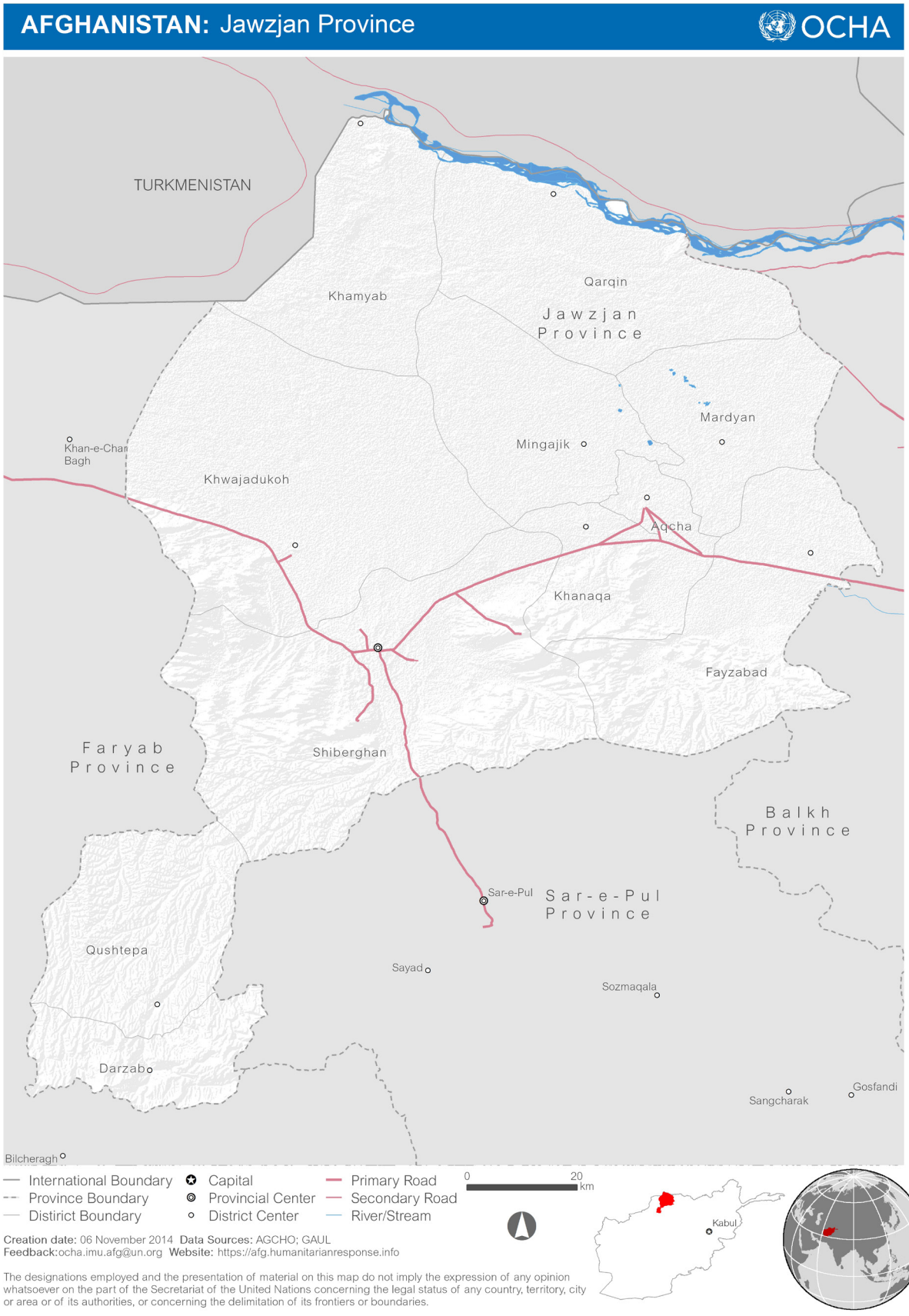
([1445]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, December 2015, p. 11.

([1446]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, December 2015, p. 5.

([1447]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: conflict induced displacements - snapshot (1 January-30 April 2016), 15 May 2016.

2.7.2. Jawzjan

General description of the province



Jawzjan is situated in the northern part of Afghanistan, bordering Turkmenistan in the north, Balkh in the east, Sar-e Pul in the south and Faryab in the west. It is divided into 11 districts (Aqcha, Darzab, Fayzabad, Khamyab, Khanaqa, Khwajadukoh, Mardyan, Mingajik, Qarqin, Qushtepa, Shiberghan) ([1448]) and its capital, Shiberghan, lies on the ring road from Mazar-e Sharif to Herat. A secondary road connects Sar-e Pul with the ring road also in Shiberghan. The province has an estimated 540,255 inhabitants; the provincial capital Shiberghan has 80,032 ([1449]). More than a quarter of the province is mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain while more than two thirds of the area is made up of flat land. The major ethnic groups living in Jawzjan Province are Uzbek and Turkmen followed by Tajik, Pashtun and Arab. Uzbek is spoken by the largest proportion of the population, followed by Turkmen ([1450]). Turkmen dominate the population in the northern and eastern districts, notably Khamyab, Qarqin, Mingajik, Mardyan and Aqcha. Uzbeks comprise the largest ethnic group in Darzab, Qushtepa and Fayzabad ([1451]). There are strategically important gas fields near Shiberghan, deemed important for the economy of neighbouring Balkh Province. Construction on a 95-kilometre pipeline has been going on for two years and occasionally attracts insurgent attacks ([1452]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Jawzjan

In December 2014, local parliamentarians warned that security threats were 'widely spread' in northern provinces, including Jawzjan ([1453]). An anonymous source in Kabul stated that due to a large number of AGEs infiltrating the province from Balkh, Sar-e Pul and Faryab, the security situation in Jawzjan deteriorated from the start of 2015 ([1454]). In February 2015, the provincial chief of police claimed that 600 AGEs 'rebranded' themselves into fighters of IS ([1455]). Since the spring of 2015, IMU is reported to have infiltrated Jawzjan Province after being driven out of Faryab Province ([1456]) along with foreign AGEs ousted from Pakistani tribal areas by a military campaign ([1457]). In April 2015, a small group of Uzbek members of IS were reportedly recruiting in some villages in Qushtepa ([1458]). In September 2015, RFE/RL estimated that there were more than 3,000 Taliban members in the north and that they captured hundreds of villages in Faryab, Sar-e Pol and Jawzjan province ([1459]). Concerning security problems in Jawzjan Province, a member of the provincial council stated in October 2015 that 'if the government supported public uprising forces and increased the number of local police personnel the move could positively impact Jawzjan's security' ([1460]). According to IWPR: 'there has been a steady increase in fighting over the last few years in the Jowzjan and Faryab provinces of Afghanistan' ([1461]).

The political situation in Jawzjan is significantly linked to Junbeshe Melli and its leader, Vice President General Abdul Rashid Dostum. After years of singleparty domination by Junbesh in the province, however, other political parties, namely Jamiat and Hezbe Islami, have succeeded in establishing bases in the province ([1462]). After months of lobbying in the National Security Council, Vice President General Abdul Rashid Dostum decided to raise his own militia to take on the AGEs in the north. In July 2015, he gathered thousands of armed men to fight the Taliban in Jawzjan ([1463]).

([1448]) Humanitarian Response, AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012.

([1449]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1450]) MRRD, Jawzjan Provincial Profile, n.d.

([1451]) International organisation, e-mail, 26 October 2014. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([1452]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Work on 95 km Jawzjan-Balkh pipeline launched, 2 July 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 dead in attack on Jawzjan check post, 6 January 2014; Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 dead in Ghor and Jawzjan clashes, 17 May 2014.

([1453]) Tolo News, Northern provinces face serious security threats, 22 December 2014.

([1454]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([1455]) Tolo News, Taliban militants raise Daesh flags in Jowzjan: Officials, 11 February 2015.

([1456]) RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flashpoints, n.d.; Tolo News, Jowzjan Police concerned over Uzbek terrorist activities, 20 April 2015.

([1457]) Tolo News, Influx of foreign militants blamed for uptick in violence, 28 April 2015.

([1458]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Jawzjan group wooing residents to join Daesh, 13 April 2015.

([1459]) RFE/RL, Return of militias To Afghan front lines sparks allegations of abuses, 5 September 2015.

([1460]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Jawzjan forces facing combat gear shortage, 6 October 2015.

([1461]) IWPR, Taleban Threat May Tempt Turkmenistan Out of Isolation, 19 February 2016.

([1462]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([1463]) NY Times, Afghan Vice President raises Concerns by Turning to Militias in Taliban Fight, 18 August 2015.

Vice President General Abdul Rashid Dostum came to Jawzjan Province to head operations against AGEs in October 2015 ([1464]) and in April 2016 ([1465]). During the latter month, Afghan security forces led ground operations and air security operations ([1466]).

In July 2015, of the 600 approved, a total of 420 ALP were reported to serve in the districts of Qush Tepa, Darzab and Fayzabad ([1467]).

In the northern districts, several former Jihadi warlords have rearmed their followers and created *arbaki* in 2014 ([1468]). The ANP Directorate of Security confirmed to UNAMA the formation of pro-government armed groups in Khamyab, Aqcha, Mingajik, Fayzabad, and Qarqin districts ([1469]). According to UNAMA these pro-government groups are responsible for human-rights abuses in Jawzjan Province ([1470]) but as they are affiliated with powerbrokers they go unpunished ([1471]). Inter-pro-government armed group activities caused 6 incidents which led to civilian casualties during the first six month of 2016 in this province ([1472]). There is also one popular militia led by an ethnic Turkmen in Jawzjan, Emir Karyad, which has been fighting the Taliban for two years ([1473]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Jawzjan Province counted 229 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1474]):

Violence targeting individuals	34
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	145
Explosions	13
Security enforcement	35
Non-conflict related incidents	1
Other incidents	1
Total security incidents	**229**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Jawzjan Province ([1475]):

Qush Tepa	52	Mardyan	9
Shiberghan	50	Mingajik	8
Aqcha	34	Khanaqa	7
Khamyab	26	Khwajadukoh	4
Fayzabad	22	Khwaja Sabz Posh	2
Darzab	13		

According to UNAMA, two health facilities were attacked during 2015 ([1476]).

([1464]) RFE/RL, Afghan Fighting Reaches Turkmenistan's Border, 23 October 2015; RFE/RL, Afghan army retakes Taliban-held district, 24 October 2015; RFE/RL, Turkmenistan's Afghan Policy Revealed, 27 October 2015.

([1465]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Dostum arrives in north, vows to teach militants a 'lesson', 19 April 2016.

([1466]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 militants dead in Jawzjan air and ground offensive, 23 April 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 46 insurgents killed in round-the-clock operations, 29 April 2016.

([1467]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([1468]) RFE/RL, Last line of defense against the Taliban – Qarqeen, 15 March 2014; RFE/RL, More warnings south of the Afghan-Turkmen Border, 17 August 2014; RFE/RL, Turkmenistans new Afghanistan border policy, 10 October 2014.

([1469]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 65.

([1470]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 65.

([1471]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 8.

([1472]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Midyear report 2016. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 86.

([1473]) IWPR, Taleban Threat May Tempt Turkmenistan Out of Isolation, 19 February 2016.

([1474]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1475]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1476]) UNAMA, Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key trends and incidents affecting children's access to healthcare and education in Afghanistan, April 2016, p. 7.

According to RFE/RL in September 2015, **Qush Tepa** district witnessed a rising Taliban presence ([1477]). In September 2015, ANSF and the Taliban suffered casualties during gun battles in Qush Tepa's Sherbeg area ([1478]) and the AGEs organised an insider attack against a checkpoint which killed at least four soldiers in this district[1479]. According to a testimony from Sherbeg area, the Taliban took control of this area from November 2015 until February 2016, when Vice President General Abdul Rashid Dostum came to Qush tepa district with 'thousands of security forces' to clear it: 'Taliban in our village have a compound, but they escaped after they were informed about Dostum's arrival in Jawzjan.' He said it was 'for the first time that local people felt safe after militants captured their village three months ago and forced villagers into paying zakat and ushr' ([1480]). In February 2016, heavy clashes were reported in Sherbeg causing AGEs to flee. These clashes led to loss of domestic animals ([1481]) and civilians casualties in Hawz Bili area ([1482]). In the same area, a shopkeeper suspected of aiding the government, was gunned down by the Taliban in March 2016 ([1483]). In July 2016, four employees of a private telecom company were abducted by the Taliban on the Qush Tepa–Sheberghan highway. A week later they were released after mediation by community elders ([1484]). In August 2016, ANSF staff were besieged for three days by Taliban forces after a clash in Qush Tepa district. They were rescued by reinforcements and air support ([1485]).

In April 2016, the killing of dozens of AGEs when they attacked a checkpoint in Qush Tepa demonstrated that they were still active in this district ([1486]). By June 2016, the entire district was considered a 'high confidence Taliban support zone' by the ISW ([1487]).

In **Aqcha** district, in Qum village, a woman died and a child and a man were injured when a rocket fired by AGEs hit their house in January 2016 ([1488]). An Aqcha inhabitant, suspected of being a Taliban member, was shot by ALP members ([1489]). In February 2016, two members of uprising forces and a policeman were killed after being kidnapped or being ambushed ([1490]). An inhabitant of this district told Pajhwok Afghan News in March 2016 that: 'No one could go a kilometer away from the district centre because militants used to ambush and punish suspected people. No government official can dare to enter villages' ([1491]). Executions by the Taliban were reported in this district: two persons suspected of being murderers in Kalra Shakh ([1492]) and a woman accused of adultery in the village of Khanqa ([1493]). ISW considered Aqsha district a 'low confidence Taliban support zone' until April 2016 ([1494]). It has been evaluated as a 'high confidence Taliban support zone' in its assessment of June 2016 ([1495]).

In **Khamyab** district, there has been fighting since the beginning of October 2015 when a joint-security operation and airstrikes against AGEs took place: 19 AGEs were killed and almost the same number injured as a result of two clashes and an air strike in Khamyab and in the neighbouring district of Mingajik ([1496]). Until 20 October 2015, the Taliban controlled all the government buildings in Khamyab district centre ([1497]). Vice President General Dostum led a clearing operation on 21 October and the Taliban was driven away; several dozen took refuge two days later on

([1477]) RFE/RL, Insurgents Kill 10 Afghan Soldiers In 'Insider Attack', 2 September 2015.

([1478]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Woman among 6 killed in Faryab, Jawzjan clashes, 2 September 2015.

([1479]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 soldiers killed in Taliban attack on ANA checkpoint, 22 September 2015; RFE/RL, Insurgents Kill 10 Afghan Soldiers In 'Insider Attack', 2 September 2015.

([1480]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban flee as Dostum arrives in Jawzjan's Qush Tapa, 4 February 2016.

([1481]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces among 9 dead in Jawzjan gunbattles, 16 February 2016.

([1482]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban flee as Dostum arrives in Jawzjan's Qush Tapa, 24 February 2016.

([1483]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 civilians gunned down in Jawzjan, Faryab, 8 March 2016.

([1484]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 kidnapped workers of MTN freed: Jawzjan governor, 24 July 2016.

([1485]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban siege broken, security personnel rescued in Jawzjan, 1 August 2016.

([1486]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz won't fall again to militants, promises governor, 17 April 2016.

([1487]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016.

([1488]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 rebels killed in Aqcha; woman dead in rocket strike, 27 January 2016.

([1489]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Midyear report 2016. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 89.

([1490]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill kidnapped policeman, uprising force member in Jawzjan, 24 February 2016.

([1491]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban execute three persons in Jawzjan, 29 March 2016.

([1492]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban execute three persons in Jawzjan, 29 March 2016.

([1493]) Khaama press, Horrific video shows Taliban publicly killing woman over adultery, 7 May 2016.

([1494]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 23 February 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Threat Assessment: The Taliban and ISIS, 10 December 2015.

([1495]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016.

([1496]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 40 Taliban killed; security forces retake Baharak district, 3 October 2015; RFE/RL, Who Do Turkmen Authorities Think They Are Fooling?, 20 October 2015.

([1497]) RFE/RL, Who Do Turkmen Authorities Think They Are Fooling?, 20 October 2015.

an island in the Amu-Darya river which divides Afghanistan from Turkmenistan ([1498]). They fought back crossing the river in Afghanistan killing between 10 or 12 of Dostum's elite troops ([1499]). During this operation 20 AGEs were killed and 10 were arrested and by the end of October local officials claimed that Khamyab was cleared of Taliban ([1500]). Nevertheless there were still clashes between security forces and the Taliban by the end of November 2015 causing casualties on both sides. The Taliban claimed to have taken control of villages in this district ([1501]). By the end of 2015, a roadside bomb killed an uprising commander and a police official ([1502]). In December 2015 ([1503]) and February 2016 ([1504]), the district centre was still contested by the Taliban. By June 2016, half of Khamyab district was considered a 'high confidence Taliban support zone' by the ISW ([1505]).

In **Fayzabad** district, in September 2015, people suspected of being ALP members were executed ([1506]) and clashes between the Taliban and local militias were reported in Keshak ([1507]). In March 2016, clashes occurred between Taliban and local militias which caused casualties on both sides in Garjak area ([1508]), Kukuldash village ([1509]) a woman accused by her in-laws of adultery was shot dead by the Taliban in Mimlik village ([1510]); and a person suspected of collaborating with the government was killed by insurgents ([1511]). By June 2016, a part of this district was assessed as a 'high confidence Taliban support zone' by the ISW which also assessed a pocket near the district centre as a Taliban control zone ([1512]).

Darzab's district centre was still contested by the Taliban in December 2015 ([1513]) and in February 2016 ([1514]). By June 2016, according to the ISW, this was no longer the case but half of the district was considered a Taliban-controlled zone and the other half a 'high confidence support zone' ([1515]).

In **Mardyan** district in December 2015, there were civilian deaths and injuries as a result of explosives that prematurely went off ([1516]) and because of Taliban infighting over land ownership in January 2016 ([1517]). In April 2016, an ambush led by the Taliban against policemen killed a dozen of them ([1518]). The next month 20 AGEs from Jangal Arigh village were reported to have 'reconciled with the government' ([1519]). According to the ISW, an area covering the south-west of this district and bordering Mingajik and Aqsha districts is, from April 2016, a 'high confidence Taliban support zone' ([1520]) while it was assessed as a 'low confidence Taliban support zone' in December 2015 ([1521]) and in February 2016 ([1522]).

In October 2015 in **Mingajik** district a local resident told Pajhwok Afghan News: 'We are in dire conditions. Taliban pass through our village regularly and they beat people on several excuses like cooperation with the government and uprisings' ([1523]). At the beginning of October 2015, AGEs were close to seizing the district centre after besieging its headquarters ([1524]). Pajhwok Afghan News reported the Taliban execution of a local elder, who was a relative

([1498]) RFE/RL, Afghan Fighting Reaches Turkmenistan's Border, 23 October 2015; RFE/RL, Afghan army retakes Taliban-held district, 24 October 2015; RFE/RL, Turkmenistan's Afghan Policy Revealed, 27 October 2015.

([1499]) RFE/RL, Turkmenistan's Afghan Policy Revealed, 27 October 2015.

([1500]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 security personnel among 28 killed in Khamab battle, 25 October 2015.

([1501]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban forced into fleeing Khamab: Jawzjan police chief, 21 November 2015.

([1502]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 uprising commanders killed, 6 robbers arrested, 30 December 2015.

([1503]) ISW, Afghanistan Threat Assessment: The Taliban and ISIS, 10 December 2015.

([1504]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 23 February 2016.

([1505]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016.

([1506]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 civilians among 6 shot to death in Jawzjan clashes, 19 December 2015.

([1507]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Woman among 6 killed in Faryab, Jawzjan clashes, 8 September 2015.

([1508]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 illegal gunmen killed in clash with Jawzjan uprising forces, 17 March 2016.

([1509]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 rebels, illegal armed men killed in fresh bout of violence, 5 March 2016.

([1510]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban accused of killing a woman on adultery charges, 27 March 2016.

([1511]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 civilians gunned down in Jawzjan, Faryab, 8 March 2016.

([1512]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016.

([1513]) ISW, Afghanistan Threat Assessment: The Taliban and ISIS, 10 December 2015.

([1514]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 23 February 2016.

([1515]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016.

([1516]) Pajhwok Afghan News, *6 civilians killed, 10 injured in Faryab, Jawzjan blasts,* 24 December 2015.

([1517]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Infighting among militants in Jawzjan causes civilian casualties, 11 January 2016.

([1518]) Pajhwok Afghan News, *Taliban ambush leaves 6 police killed in Jawzjan*, 4 April 2016.

([1519]) Pajhwok Afghan News, *Dozens of insurgents give up violence in Jawzjan,* 2 May 2016.

([1520]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016.

([1521]) ISW, Afghanistan Threat Assessment: The Taliban and ISIS, 10 December 2015.

([1522]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 23 February 2016.

([1523]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban court orders elderly man executed in Jawzjan, 19 October 2015.

([1524]) Pajhwok Afghan News, *40 Taliban killed; security forces retake Baharak district,* 3 October 2015.

of a commander of an uprising group in the same month ([1525]). In March 2016, an ex-member of an uprising group with no links with the government was assassinated ([1526]). According to the ISW, this district is assessed as a 'high confidence Taliban support zone' with a large pocket bordering Khwajadukoh district controlled by the group since December 2015 ([1527]).

Khanaqa district was the scene of clashes between the Taliban and security forces in September 2015 ([1528]). According to the ISW, in this district only a strip bordering Shiberghan district was a 'high confidence Taliban support zone' in June 2016 ([1529]).

UNAMA reported an incident in **Khwajadukoh** district where the Taliban forced female students over 12 years old to wear burqas ([1530]).

Displacement

In an overview of profiled IDPs from January to December 2015, Jawzjan is in the lowest category, from 22 to 1,273 in 2015 ([1531]). In September 2015, UNHCR stated that small case displacements were profiled in Jawzjan ([1532]). In November 2015, only three families from this province who moved to Ghazni were assessed ([1533]) and few families from Jawzjan were registered in Logar Province ([1534]). In January 2016, according to Pajhwok Afghan News, thousands of people were displaced in Aqcha district because of overnights clashes ([1535]). From January to April 2016, UNOCHA assessed 2,000 IDPs in Jawzjan Province ([1536]).

([1525]) Pajhwok Afghan News, *Taliban court orders elderly man executed in Jawzjan,* 19 October 2015.

([1526]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban execute three persons in Jawzjan, 29 March 2016.

([1527]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016, ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 23 February 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Threat Assessment: The Taliban and ISIS, 10 December 2015.

([1528]) Pajhwok Afghan News, *Jawzjan forces facing combat gear shortage,* 6 October 2015.

([1529]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016.

([1530]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Midyear report 2016. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 21.

([1531]) UNHCR, Afghanistan conflict-induced internal displacement 2015: the year in review, April 2016, p. 16.

([1532]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, September 2015, p. 2.

([1533]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, November 2015, p. 4.

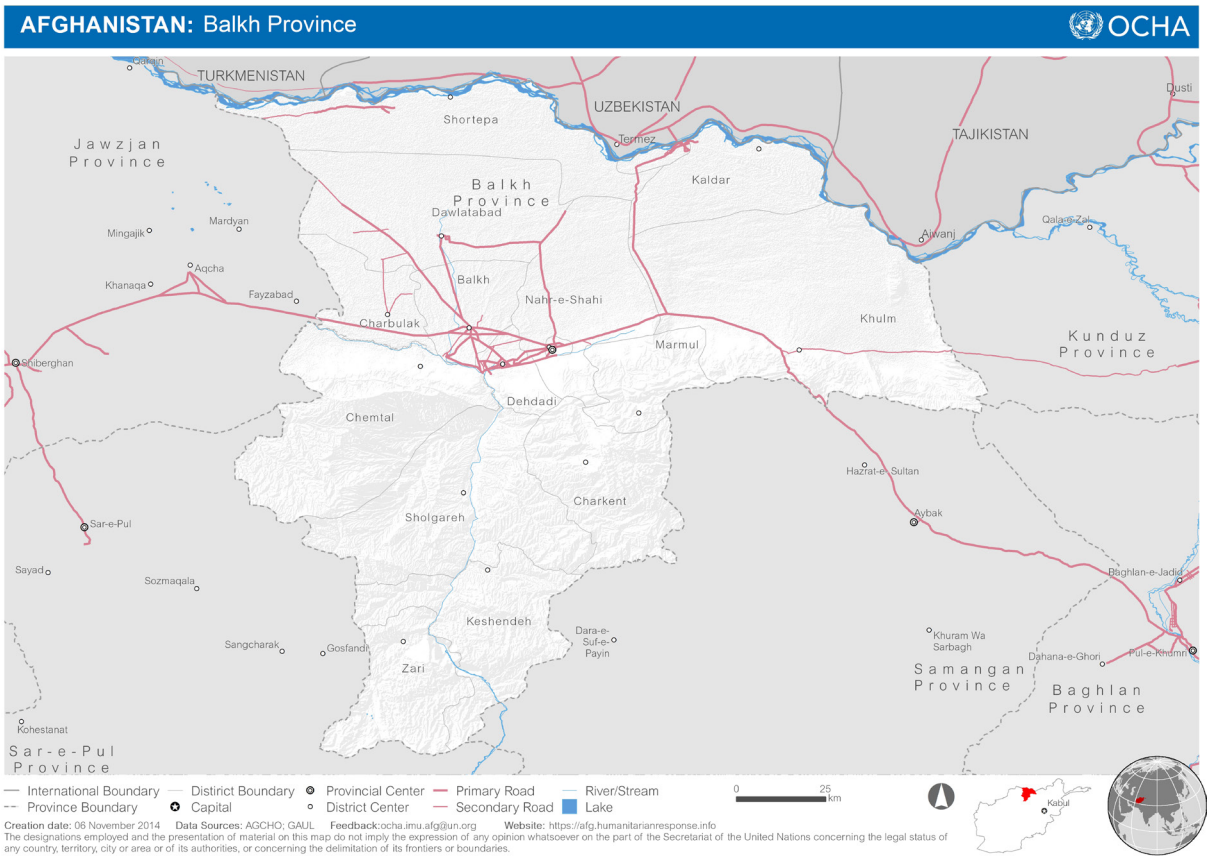
([1534]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, November 2015, p. 4.

([1535]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Thousands of civilians flee fighting in Jawzjan's Aqcha district, 28 January 2016.

([1536]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Humanitarian Bulletin Issue 51 | 01 – 30 April 2016, 15 May 2016, p. 1.

2.7.3. Balkh

General description of the province



Balkh is situated in the northern part of Afghanistan, bordering Uzbekistan in the north, Tajikistan in the northeast, Kunduz in the east, Samangan in the southeast, Sare Pul in the southwest and Jawzjan in the west. The province is estimated to have 1,325,659 inhabitants, of which an estimated 402,806 live in Mazar-e Sharif ([1537]). The province is divided into 15 districts: Balkh, Charbulak, Charkent, Chemtal, Dawlatabad, Dehdadi, Kaldar, Keshendeh, Khulm, Marmul, Mazare Sharif, NahreShahi, Sholgareh, Shortepa, Zari ([1538]). The major ethnic groups living in Balkh province are Tajiks and Pashtuns followed by Uzbek, Hazaras, Turkmen, Arab and Baluch ([1539]).

Mazare Sharif is one of the biggest commercial and financial centres of Afghanistan ([1540]). The city lies on an important eastwest connection between Herat in the west and Kabul and Kunduz in the east. On the border with Uzbekistan lies the vital economic dry port of Hairatan ([1541]). Balkh has a tradition of high educational standards and has a comparatively high literacy rate, including for women. It is home to several universities including Balkh University, the secondlargest in Afghanistan ([1542]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Balkh

An important factor in the conflict in the North is the 209th Shaheen Military Corps, based in Balkh province and led by General Zalmai Weesa ([1543]). The decline in insurgent activity in Balkh district was attributed to ANSF effectiveness and specifically to the new district police chief in January 2015 ([1544]).

([1537]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1538]) Humanitarian Response, AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012.

([1539]) MRRD, Balkh Provincial Profile, n.d.

([1540]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Background Profile of Balkh', n.d.

([1541]) CMFC, The rise of Afghan rails, 18 November 2010; Fishstein, P., Balkh's economy in transition, AREU, August 2013.

([1542]) MOHE, Balkh University, 15 January 2015; MRRD, Balkh Provincial Profile, n.d.

([1543]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Rebels' infiltration into north blocked: Weesa, 22 December 2014.

([1544]) APPRO, Afghanistan: Monitoring Women's Security in Transition. Cycle 5, January 2015, pp. 19-22.

According to a 2016 study by APPRO ([1545]):

> 'In general, citizens' complaints are more vociferously lodged against informal power holders than against ANP. In general, the police respond well to complaints about street harassment and protect girls on their way to and from school. There are also reports of some police personnel insulting schoolgirls, driving fast, and harassing hawkers and street venders for bribes. No cases of abuse by law enforcement officials have been registered in the province over the last four months, however.'

In 2014, ALP was deployed in the Alborz districts of Chemtal, Charbulak and Sholgareh ([1546]) and pro-government groups have been present in Chemtal and Charbulak districts since September 2015 ([1547]). According to UNAMA these pro-government groups are responsible of human-rights abuses in Balkh province; during the first six months of 2016 inter-pro-government armed group activities caused three incidents which led to civilian casualties in the province ([1548]).

In January 2015, shortly after IS announced the birth of the Khorasan chapter, jihadi leaders and youth created the group "Margh" ("Death") in Mazar-e Sharif. They claimed they had 5,000 followers and would fight against any form of terrorism in Afghanistan ([1549]). In March 2016, Balkh governor Atta Mohammad Noor stated that some AGEs pledged allegiance to IS and that they might be 'remnants of the IMU, sent to northwestern areas of Afghanistan by their leader, Usman Ghazi, after he swore allegiance to Islamic State and before Ghazi was killed in November 2015' ([1550]).

According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh's drug smugglers are a factor of instability as they spent 30 % of their income on insurgent operations' costs ([1551]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Balkh Province counted 370 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1552]):

Violence targeting individuals	48
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	165
Explosions	62
Security enforcement	93
Non-conflict related incidents	4
Other incidents	1
Total security incidents	**370**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Balkh Province ([1553]):

Chemtal	78	Nahr-e Shahi	12
Charbulak	55	Kaldar	12
Keshendeh	49	Balkh	12
Dawlatabad	42	Khulm	5
Mazar-e Sharif	27	Dehdadi	4
Shortepa	27	Charkent	1
Sholgareh	23	Marmul	0
Zari	23		

([1545]) APPRO, Afghanistan Rights Monitor: Baseline Report, April 2016, p. 23.

([1546]) US Department of Defense, Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in, April 2014, p. 55.

([1547]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 65

([1548]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Midyear report 2016. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 86.

([1549]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Ex-jihadi leaders pledge support to security forces, 22 January 2015; Khaama Press, "Marg" Group formed against Taliban and ISIS in northern Afghanistan, 27 January 2015.

([1550]) RFE/RL, A Knock At Uzbekistan's Southern Door, 4 May 2016.

([1551]) Pajhwok Afghan News, *Drug smugglers finance rebels in north: Gen. Hameed*, 12 December 2015.

([1552]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1553]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

Balkh witnessed seven attacks on health facilities in 2015 ([1554]).

According to researcher Paul Fishstein who carried out field work in Balkh Province in May 2015 ([1555]):

> 'Security in some areas of Balkh such as Jar Qalah was considered better due to the creation several years ago, under the sponsorship of Governor Atta, of the Afghan Local Police (ALP), which puts some money in local pockets, even if it raises concerns about long-term stability. Areas of Charbulak, while not considered completely secure, were seen as better than two years ago. Taliban were said to circulate mainly at night, with elements from Koh-e Alburz (Alburz Mountains) attacking Chemtal and also collecting ten percent ushr (traditional tithe paid to the mullah or other religious leader for their services) in order to keep the opium poppy fields safe. Variation in security even within the two districts underlines the localised nature of conditions in Afghanistan.'

Balkh provincial capital, Mazar-e Sharif, witnessed blasts and attacks which affected its residents. In October 2015, a small bomb was thrown in a mobile market located in Tor Bazaar area and at least 9 people were wounded ([1556]). Two months later a police vehicle was targeted by a magnetic bomb ([1557]). On 3 January 2016, 5 civilians were caught in the crossfire between Afghan forces and AGEs who tried, unsuccessfully, to enter the Indian consulate ([1558]). In order to assure security for *Nowruz* celebrations in the provincial capital, the provincial governor led military operations against AGEs in the first week of March 2016 ([1559]) and in May 2016 against AGEs' offensives from Samangan and Sar-e-Pul ([1560]). In August 2016, a suicide attack near a market in Mazar killed one civilian and injured 14 others, including a child and three women ([1561]).

In October 2015, Chemtal district was the scene of a family murder (4 killed and 3 wounded). The ALP linked the case to a Taliban commander ([1562]). According to the ISW, an area covering half the southern part and a smaller pocket in the north of this district is, as of April 2016, a 'high confidence Taliban support zone' ([1563]) while it was considered a 'low confidence support zone' in February 2016 ([1564]). In May 2016, during a joint military clearing operation in Chemtal district, between 30 ([1565]) and 45 Taliban were killed ([1566]).

In Charbulak district, in March 2016, Taliban fighters came in order to destabilise the security of the highway connecting Mazar-e Sharif and Shiberghan ([1567]). They attacked security posts and during the clashes at least two policemen died and 20 Taliban were killed, injured or fled to the neighbouring district of Fayzabad (Jawzjan Province) ([1568]). Some weeks later, in April 2016, another Charbulak district's police outpost was attacked by AGEs coming from Jawzjan Province ([1569]).

In the southern districts of Balkh, Zari and Keshendeh, IS presence has been reported as its black flag was observed ([1570]) and the provincial governor stated that his forces repelled the Taliban and loyalists of IS during a clearing operation in Zari and Keshendeh district in March 2016 ([1571]). A young insurgent captured during this operation claimed to have been trained by IS during three months in Keshendeh district ([1572]). The clearing operation was led by Atta Mohammad Noor as 'Both extremist groups [Taliban and Daesh] are trying to destabilize this valley [near the Deh Yak village], as well as Keshendeh and Shulgara districts and other parts of Balkh province' ([1573]). AGEs were planning to set up an operational base in Sizda village in Keshendeh district where they killed, tortured residents and torched their

([1554]) UNAMA, Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key trends and incidents affecting children's access to healthcare and education in Afghanistan, April 2016, p. 7.

([1555]) Fishstein, P., Briefing note on fieldwork in Balkh Province, May 2015. Opium Poppy and rural livelihoods, October 2015, p. 1.

([1556]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 wounded, two critically, in Balkh bomb attack, 29 October 2015.

([1557]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Policeman among 5 wounded in Balkh, Khost explosions, 17 December 2015.

([1558]) RFE/RL, Siege Ends Near Indian Consulate In Northern Afghanistan, 4 January 2016.

([1559]) Khaama press, Operations led by Ata Mohammad Noor launched in Balkh ahead of Nowruz celebrations, 7 March 2016.

([1560]) Khaama press, Noor says Afghan forces turned Balkh into graveyard of Taliban and ISIS, 16 May 2016.

([1561]) Tolo News, Mazar-i-Sharif Blast Leaves One Dead, 14 Wounded, 9 August 2016.

([1562]) Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP personnel gun down 3 civilians of a family in Balkh, 28 October 2015.

([1563]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016.

([1564]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 23 February 2016.

([1565]) Khaama press, 61 militants in latest air and ground operations of Afghan forces, 25 May 2016.

([1566]) Tolo News, 45 Insurgents Killed in Balkh Clashes: Officials, 26 May 2016.

([1567]) Tolo News, Two Policemen Killed in Balkh Clash, 30 March 2016.

([1568]) Tolo News, Two Policemen Killed in Balkh Clash, 30 March 2016; Khaama press, Policemen and Taliban militants suffer casualties in Balkh clash, 30 March 2016.

([1569]) Tolo News, 12 Taliban Insurgents Killed in Balkh Clashes, 18 April 2016.

([1570]) Jamestown Foundation (The), Resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan's North, 1 April 2016.

([1571]) Khaama press, Noor says Afghan forces confronted ISIS loyalists in Balkh operations, 13 March 2016.

([1572]) Tolo News, Daesh srufaces in Balkh : Atta Noor, 13 March 2016.

([1573]) Tolo News, Daesh srufaces in Balkh : Atta Noor, 13 March 2016.

houses ([1574]). According to the ISW, an area covering more than the half of Keshendeh district is, from April 2016, a 'high confidence Taliban support zone' ([1575]) while it was assessed as a 'low confidence Taliban support zone' in February 2016 ([1576]). In May 2016, new clashes occurred between ANSF and the Taliban in Keshendeh district ([1577]).

In Kaldar district, bordering Uzbekistan and Tadjikistan, border police officers were targeted by the Taliban. Two of them were killed by a roadside bomb in March 2016 ([1578]) and one of their border posts was attacked in May 2016 ([1579]).

In February 2016, when a minibus of the 209 Shaheen corps went through Nawabad area in Dehdadi district, it was attacked by a suicide bomber which killed three soldiers and injured 18 others ([1580]). A few days later there was a counter-terrorism operation in this district led by the ANSF ([1581]).

Displacement

In September 2015, few families from Balkh went to Maidan Wardak and some 1,200 families from Kunduz moved to Balkh ([1582]). In an overview of profiled IDPs from January to December 2015, Balkh is in the second-lowest category, from 1,274 to 3,871 IDPS in 2015 ([1583]) with more than 2,000 IDPs ([1584]). From January to April 2016, UNOCHA assessed very few IDPs in Balkh ([1585]).

([1574]) Khaama press, Noor: Afghan forces stopped militants to establish strong operational base in Balkh, 9 March 2016.

([1575]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016.

([1576]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 23 February 2016.

([1577]) Khaama press, 17 Taliban insurgents killed in air and ground raids in north of Afghanistan, 11 May 2016.

([1578]) Tolo News, Two Border Policemen Killed in Balkh Roadside Mine Blast, 28 March 2016.

([1579]) RFE/RL, A Knock At Uzbekistan's Southern Door, 4 May 2016.

([1580]) Khaama press, 3 killed, 20 wounded in suicide attack near Mazar-i-Sharif, 8 February 2016; RFE/RL, At Least Three Afghan Soldiers Killed In Suicide Bombing, 8 February 2016.

([1581]) Khaama press, 22 militants killed in counter-terrorism operations led by Afghan army, 12 February 2016.

([1582]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, September 2015, p. 4.

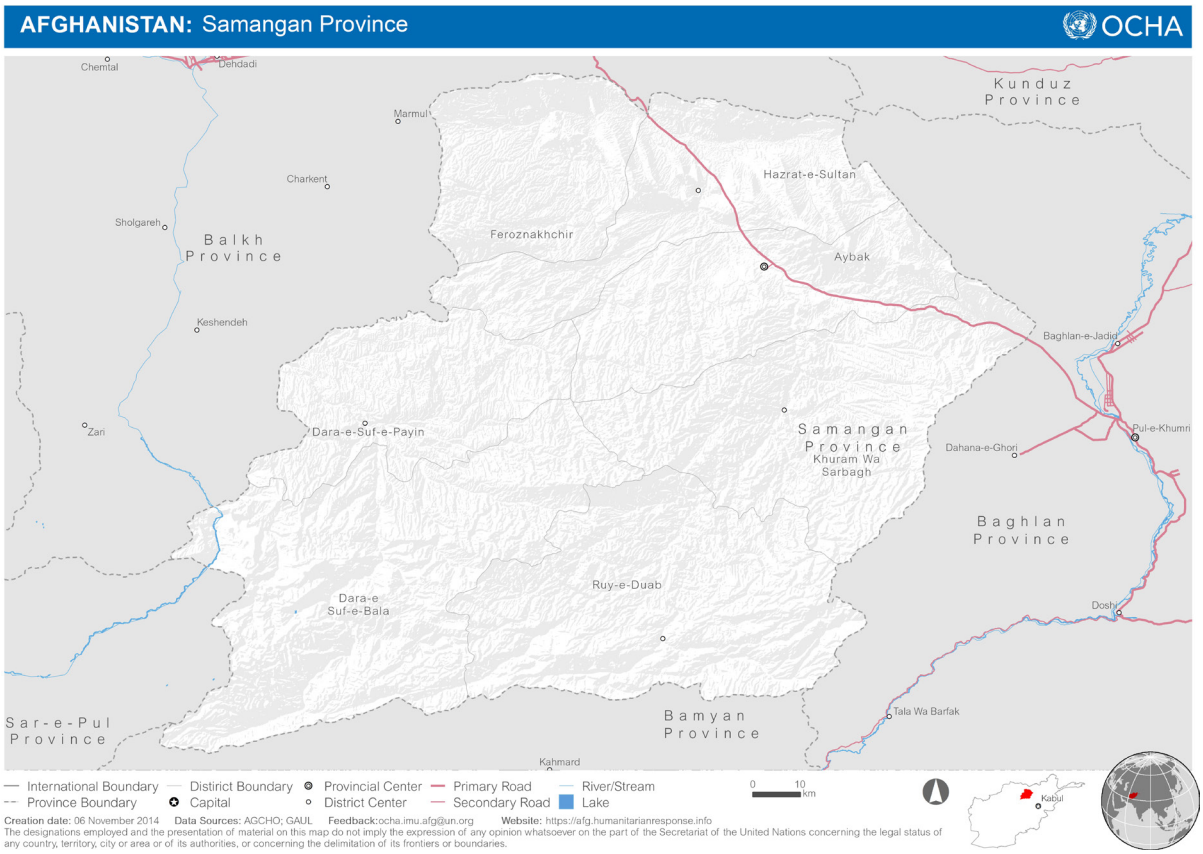
([1583]) UNHCR, Afghanistan conflict-induced internal displacement 2015: the year in review, April 2016, p. 16.

([1584]) UNHCR, Afghanistan conflict-induced internal displacement 2015: the year in review, April 2016, p. 5.

([1585]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Humanitarian Bulletin Issue 51 | 01 – 30 April 2016, 15 May 2016, p. 1.

2.7.4. Samangan

General description of the province



Samangan is located in northern Afghanistan and shares provincial borders with Balkh, Sare Pul, Kunduz, Baghlan and Bamyan. The province is divided into seven districts: Aybak, DaraeSufeBala, DaraeSufePayin, Feroz Nakhchir, HazrateSultan, Khuram Wa Sarbagh, RuyeDuab and the provincial capital is Aybak ([1586]). The major ethnic groups living in Samangan province are Uzbek and Tajiks followed by Pashtuns, Hazaras, Arabs and Tatars ([1587]). With an estimated population of 387,928, Samangan is one of the least populated provinces of Afghanistan ([1588]).

Through the northwestern corner of the province, the road connecting Mazar-e Sharif with Pul-e Khumri and Kabul crosses the provincial capital Aybak ([1589]). Samangan is home to some of Afghanistan's biggest coalmines. One coalmine in Dara-e Suf is said to employ about 6,000 people, of whom 2,000 are child labourers ([1590]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Samangan

In May 2015, residents complained about a deteriorating security situation. A provincial council member stated Samangan 'was said to be a peaceful province, but lately insurgents intensified their activities and some parts of the province became insecure' ([1591]). Officials suggested that AGEs active in neighbouring Baghlan use Samangan as a safe haven in case of ANSF operations against them ([1592]). In October 2015, 26 AGEs who were active in the provincial capital, Aybak, joined the peace process; one of them was the Samangan's shadow governor ([1593]). Samangan is also

([1586]) Humanitarian Response, AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012.

([1587]) MRRD, Samangan Provincial Profile, n.d.

([1588]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1589]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Samangan Province - Reference Map, 30 March 2014.

([1590]) Tolo News, Child labor in Samangan coal mines, 5 March 2015.

([1591]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Samangan PC performance unsatisfactory: Residents, 25 May 2015.

([1592]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan-i-Markazi district cleared of rebels, 24 May 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban take control of area after police retreat, 23 July 2015.

([1593]) Tolo News, Taliban's Samangan Shadow governor joins peace process, 15 October 2015.

one of the 9 provinces where IS Khorassan has appointed recruiters ([1594]). As of 2015, there was no ALP programme rolled out in Samangan ([1595]) but pro-government armed groups are present in Aybak district ([1596]) and, according to UNAMA, pro-government armed groups are responsible for human-rights abuses in Samangan ([1597]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Samangan Province counted 42 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1598]):

Violence targeting individuals	5
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	18
Explosions	5
Security enforcement	9
Non-conflict related incidents	4
Other incidents	1
Total security incidents	**42**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Samangan Province ([1599]):

Aybak	18	Ruy-e Duab	1
Dara-i Suf-e Payin	17	Dara-i Suf-e Bala	0
Hazrat-e Sultan	5	Khuram Wa Sarbagh	0
Feroz Nakhchir	1		

In March 2016, IWPR reported a sharp increase in violence against women in Samangan, with 200 recorded cases during the preceding year ([1600]). Pajhwok reported the same trend in February 2016 ([1601]). UNAMA also reported three attacks on health facilities in Sar-e Pul for 2015 ([1602]).

Most of the incidents were concentrated in Aybak district in the capital city or its outskirts. In September 2015, AGEs were prevented by the NDS from carrying out a suicide attack in Sarwar-i-Kaynat mosque ([1603]). Two weeks later explosives placed in a motorbike injured five people ([1604]). In January 2016, the chief of the High Peace Council (HPC) for Samangan was killed in Aybak City ([1605]). In December 2015, Taliban fighters arrived in an outskirt of the capital Aybak, named Akhta Khana. Local residents asked them to leave and this led to an armed clash in which a local former commander was killed and a Taliban fighter injured ([1606]). In the Qara-i-Tayekhwank area, the Taliban has established its presence over two years. A local commander collects by force *ushr*, *zakat* and taxes and a youth was killed in February 2016 ([1607]). On the outskirts of the provincial capital, three police officers were killed when their checkpoint was attacked in Rabata area in April 2016 ([1608]).

UNAMA mentioned the targeted killing of 3 Hazara civilians in Dara-i Suf district underlining that 'the motivation behind the killings remains unclear' ([1609]). In the spring of 2016, some incidents were mentioned by Pajhwok Afghan News in Dara-e Suf-e Payin district. In March 2016, a roadside bombing killed the military attorney of Daikundi

([1594]) USIP, The Islamic State in Afghanistan: Assessing the Threat, 7 April 2016, p. 2.

([1595]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 67.

([1596]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 65.

([1597]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Midyear report 2016. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 86.

([1598]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1599]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1600]) IWPR, Afghan Women Speak Out Against Violence, 10 March 2016.

([1601]) Pajhwok Afghan news, Sharp rise in violence agaisnt women in Samangan, 3 February 2016.

([1602]) UNAMA, Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key trends and incidents affecting children's access to healthcare and education in Afghanistan, April 2016, p. 7.

([1603]) Khaama press, NDS prevents suicide attack in Samangan mosque, 7 September 2015.

([1604]) Tolo News, Five Civilians Injured in Samangan Blast, 20 September 2015.

([1605]) Khaama press, High Peace Council Samangan chief gunned down, 5 January 2016.

([1606]) Pajhwok Afghan news, Ex-jihadi leader killed in clash with Taliban near Aibak, 6 December 2015.

([1607]) Tolo News, Youth's killing sparks protest in Samangan, 20 February 2016.

([1608]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 policement, an insurgent killed in Samangan, 8 April 2016.

([1609]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Midyear report 2016. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 65.

province ([1610]). April 2016 marked a full year since the Taliban closed the road connecting Dara-e Suf-e Bala and Dara-e Suf-e Payin districts to the provincial capital, Aybak ([1611]). During this year, truck drivers complained about extortion by illegal armed men and AGEs on the road between the district and Aybak ([1612]). This district was attacked by more than 300 AGEs in April 2016 and a clash between the Taliban and security forces caused the death of one policeman ([1613]). The ISW considers that more than half of the north of Dara-e Suf Payin is a high confidence Taliban support zone and that a small pocket in this district is under its control since April 2016 ([1614]). In July 2016, according to the Afghan Ministry of Interior, a military operation in Dara-i Suf district led to the surrender of about 260 Taliban fighters ([1615]).

Displacement

According to the UNHCR, in October ([1616]) and November 2015 ([1617]), only small case displacements were profiled in Samangan. In an overview of profiled IDPs from January to December 2015, this province is in the lowest category, from 22 to 1,273 in 2015 ([1618]). From January to April 2016, UNOCHA assessed 1,000 IDPS in Samangan ([1619]).

([1610]) Pajhwok Afghan news, Daikundi military attorney killed in oradside bomb, 30 March 2016.

([1611]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Rebels block Dara-i-Sawf-Balkh road, 22 April 2016.

([1612]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Truck drivers protest extortion on Samangan road, 25 June 2015.

([1613]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Rebels block Dara-i-Sawf-Balkh road, 22 April 2016.

([1614]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016.

([1615]) Khaama Press, MoI claims 260 Taliban militants surrendered in Samangan province, 26 July 2016.

([1616]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, October 2015, p. 2.

([1617]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, November 2015, p. 2.

([1618]) UNHCR, Afghanistan conflict-induced internal displacement 2015: the year in review, April 2016, p. 16.

([1619]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Humanitarian Bulletin Issue 51 | 01 – 30 April 2016, 15 May 2016, p. 1.

2.7.5. Sar-e Pul

General description of the province

Sar-e Pul borders Ghor and Bamyan provinces to the south, Faryab, Jawzjan and Balkh to the west and north and Samangan to the east. It is a mountainous province, especially in its southern part. The province consists of the following districts: Balkhab, Gosfandi, Kohestanat, Sangcharak, Sare Pul, Sayad, Sozmaqala ([1620]). The provincial capital is the town of Sare Pul ([1621]). The province has an estimated 559,577 inhabitants ([1622]).

The major ethnic groups living in Sare Pul province are Uzbek, Pashtun, Hazara, followed by Arab and Tajik; the major tribe is Uzbek in all districts ([1623]).

Sare Pul is among the richest provinces when it comes to natural resources. The province has vast reserves of petroleum, copper and other natural resources ([1624]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Sar-e Pul

Villagers complained in Kohestanat and Sozmaqala districts about growing insurgent infiltration in the spring of 2015 and have mobilised self-defence groups ([1625]). These groups, or so-called 'popular uprisings', were reportedly involved in the fighting to retake the district of Kohestanat in August 2015 ([1626]). In June 2015, Obaid Ali from the Afghanistan Analyst Network reported that the security situation in the province had been deteriorating over the previous two years ([1627]). In September 2015, RFE/RL estimated that there were more than 3,000 Taliban in the northern region and that, since July 2015, they captured hundreds of villages in Faryab, Sar-e Pol and Jowzjan provinces ([1628]). One lawyer told Pajhwok Afghan News that these AGEs came to Sar-e Pul Province after fleeing Kunduz ([1629]).

Sar-e Pul is one of the 9 provinces where IS appointed recruiters ([1630]). According to RFE/RL the IMU is present as well ([1631]).

According to Obaid Ali ([1632]):

> 'The security forces seem helpless. According to Haji Payenda, the deputy head of the ALP in Sheramha, last year all 81 ALP members fled to Sar-e Pul city, taking their families with them. Two ALP commanders joined the insurgents with 18 of their men.
> Reconciliation attempts with the local insurgents remain futile. Speaking to AAN, Mawlawi Naqib, the provincial director of the High Peace Council, stated that in the past few years, 750 Taleban, including their field commanders, had indeed joined the peace process, but many then re-joined the insurgents. Six months ago, for example, a Taleban commander, named as Khan Muhammad, along with his 51 followers, laid down his weapons. However, local strongmen pushed the provincial judicial department to issue an order for his arrest and accuse him of criminal activities. The Taleban commander swiftly re-joined the insurgents.'

Next to regular ANSF, ALP was reported to be active in the western districts of Sare Pul, Kohestanat and Sayad in 2014[1633]. There have been reports of misconduct by ALP ([1634]) and, according to UNAMA, the worst incidents committed by ALP in 2015 were in Sar-e Pul and three other provinces (Kunduz, Badakhshan and Kandahar) ([1635]). Militias also committed human-rights abuses in Sar-e Pul Province ([1636]).

([1620]) Humanitarian Response, *AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries*, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012.

([1621]) MRRD, Sar-i-Pul Provincial Profile, n.d.

([1622]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1623]) MRRD, Sar-i-Pul Provincial Profile, n.d.

([1624]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Sar-i-Pul Province Background Profile, n.d.

([1625]) RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, July 2015.

([1626]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Sar-i-Pul clashes leave 20 dead, 11 wounded, 5 August 2015.

([1627]) Ali O., The Insurgency in the North: Case studies from Kunduz and Sar-e Pul, 4 June 2015.

([1628]) RFE/RL, Return of militias To Afghan front lines sparks allegations of abuses, 5 September 2015.

([1629]) Pajhwok Afghan News, MPs fear Kunduz-style attacks in other provinces, 5 October 2015.

([1630]) USIP, The Islamic State in Afghanistan: Assessing the Threat, April 2016, p. 2.

([1631]) RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, July 2015.

([1632]) Ali, O., The Insurgency in the North: Case studies from Kunduz and Sar-e Pul, 4 June 2015.

([1633]) US Department of Defense, Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, April 2014, p. 55.

([1634]) Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP chided over families' displacement, 28 October 2013; Pajhwok Afghan News, AIHRC wants illegal armed groups disbanded, 2 September 2014; UNAMA, Afghanistan. Midyear Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2015, pp. 71 and 76.

([1635]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Annual Report 2015. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 67.

([1636]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Midyear report 2016. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 86.

According to Obaid Ali ([1637]):

> 'Sar-e Pul is mostly dominated by three political parties: Jombesh-e Melli Islami Afghanistan, Hezb-e Wahdat-e Islami Mardom-e Afghanistan and Jamiat-e Islami Afghanistan. According to Masuma Ramazan, a provincial council member, the competition for government posts between Jamiat and Jombesh is a major factor affecting the security situation negatively. "The government posts are exploited for personal interests by local strongmen, and this always intensifies the feud among local players," she stated. Commanders switch sides frequently – and sometimes over to the Taleban.'

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 216, Sar-e Pul Province counted 142 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1638]):

Violence targeting individuals	18
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	100
Explosions	11
Security enforcement	11
Non-conflict related incidents	2
Total security incidents	**142**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Sar-e Pul Province ([1639]):

Sar-e Pul	77	Kohestanat	5
Sayad	24	Gosfandi	1
Sozma Qala	19	Balkhab	0
Sangcharak	16		

In January 2016, Mohammad Zahir Wahdat, Sar-e Pul governor, said that 'the security situation in his province had improved, but instability loomed because Afghan forces were busy in fighting against militants on all the four sides of the province' ([1640]). In 2015, three health facilities were attacked in this province ([1641]). In November 2015, Pajhwok reported increasing security threats on the roads in the province with 29 people being abducted during the previous months, including teachers, employees of the government and others; those with no links with the government have been kidnapped on the highway to Jawzjan Province ([1642]).

In October 2015, a clash between security forces and the Taliban in Sar-e Pul City caused civilian casualties ([1643]). In February 2016, a bomb planted on a handcart exploded in front of a bank during a work-day afternoon, killing one person and injuring four civilians ([1644]).

In January 2016, fighting occurred in Sar-i Pul district between security forces and AGEs in Sultan Ibrahim, Dara and Kala Sokhta areas, close to the provincial capital. Military operations were led in Adrang, Balghi, Latai, Kala Sokhta and Sultan Ibrahim areas in the same month ([1645]) and in Sang Toda area in February 2016 ([1646]). In the latter district and in Sayad district, there was also a joint-clearing operation in January 2016 led by the governor which caused casualties on both sides ([1647]). In February 2016, a passenger van was attacked near Sar-e Pul City but as a police commander was on board a clash broke out causing 7 deaths and 17 injuries. The Taliban denied responsibility for the killings but said that an armed clash between police and residents led to 20 deaths and that policemen torched residents' houses ([1648]).

([1637]) Ali, O., The Insurgency in the North: Case studies from Kunduz and Sar-e Pul, 4 June 2015.

([1638]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1639]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1640]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Winter best time to eliminate secrurity threats: Governors, 7 January 2016.

([1641]) UNAMA, Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key trends and incidents affecting children's access to healthcare and education in Afghanistan, April 2016, p. 7.

([1642]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Insecurity on Sar-i-Pul-Jawzjan highway fuels concerns, 24 November 2015.

([1643]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Sar-i-Pul clash leaves 1 civilian dead, 2 policemen hurt, 5 October 2015.

([1644]) Pajhwok Afghan news, 1 killed, 4 wounded in Sar-i-Pul explosion, 7 February 2016.

([1645]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Operations against militants to continue:Sar-i-Pul governor, 3 January 2016.

([1646]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 insurgents suffer casualties in Sar-i-Pul clashes, 7 February 2016.

([1647]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Operations against militants to continue:Sar-i-Pul governor, 3 January 2016.

([1648]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Nearly a dozen dead in hours-long Sar-i-Pul clashes, 28 February 2016.

In October 2015, Pajhwok reported that the Taliban besieged the district centre of Kohestanat. Fierce fighting with ANSF caused access roads to be closed. According to a local police commander, only two villages in the district were under government control ([1649]). The ISW reported that the district centre had been controlled by the AGEs since December 2015 ([1650]). In January 2016, the governor of Sar-e Pul Province admitted that Kohestanat 'remained occupied by the militants' ([1651]). The Taliban has also enjoyed a 'high confidence support zone' in the north-east of this district until at least April 2016 ([1652]).

In Sozmaqala district, a small pocket in the north-west is considered a Taliban high confidence support zone by the ISW ([1653]). In September 2015, the Taliban implemented the sharia by publicly stoning a couple accused of adultery ([1654]). In May 2016, 14 civilians were injured because of clashes between AGE and ANA ([1655]). In August 2016, three children were injured in an explosion in Sozmaqala district ([1656]).

In November 2015, the Taliban controlled most of Sancharak district and heavy fighting occurred between 'uprising groups' and the Taliban on 24 November 2015 ([1657]). Three days later, the Taliban still controlled Masjid Sabz, Gajwa and Topkhan in this district and came close to seizing the district centre on 27 November 2015 ([1658]). By 1 December, a clearing operation was undertaken by the army including air force, the police, NDS, and uprising groups in order to retake Sancharak district ([1659]). In August 2016, ANSF clashed with the Taliban in Sancharak district. The clash led to casualties on both sides ([1660]).

Displacement

In October ([1661]) and November 2015 ([1662]), small-scale displacements were profiled in Sar-e Pul and more than 2,000 IDPs were assessed for 2015 ([1663]). From January to April 2016, UNOCHA assessed 2,000 IDPS in Sar-e Pul ([1664]).

([1649]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Intense battle underway for Kohistanat district, 5 October 2015.

([1650]) ISW, Afghanistan Threat Assessment: The Taliban and ISIS, 10 December 2015; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 23 February 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016.

([1651]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Winter best time to eliminate security threats: Governors, 7 January 2016.

([1652]) ISW, Afghanistan Threat Assessment: The Taliban and ISIS, 10 December 2015; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 23 February 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016; ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016.

([1653]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 12 April 2016; SW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment, 30 June 2016.

([1654]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Insurgents stone SAr_i_Pul pair on adultery charges, 12 September 2015.

([1655]) UNAMA, Afghanistan. Midyear report 2016. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, July 2016, p. 38.

([1656]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 civilians killed, 3 injured in Kandahar, Sar-I-Pul incidents, 13 August 2016.

([1657]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Sar-i-pul fighting goes on since last 24 hours, 25 November 2015.

([1658]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Sancharak district on the verge of collapse, officials warn, 27 November 2015.

([1659]) Khaama press, Military operation ongoing to recapture lost areas in Sar-e-Pol's Sancharak District, 1 December 2015.

([1660]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 25 killed, 32 wounded in Sar-i-Pul clashes, 21 August 2016.

([1661]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, October 2015, p. 2.

([1662]) UNHCR, Conflict-induced Internal Displacement – Monthly Update, November 2015, p. 2.

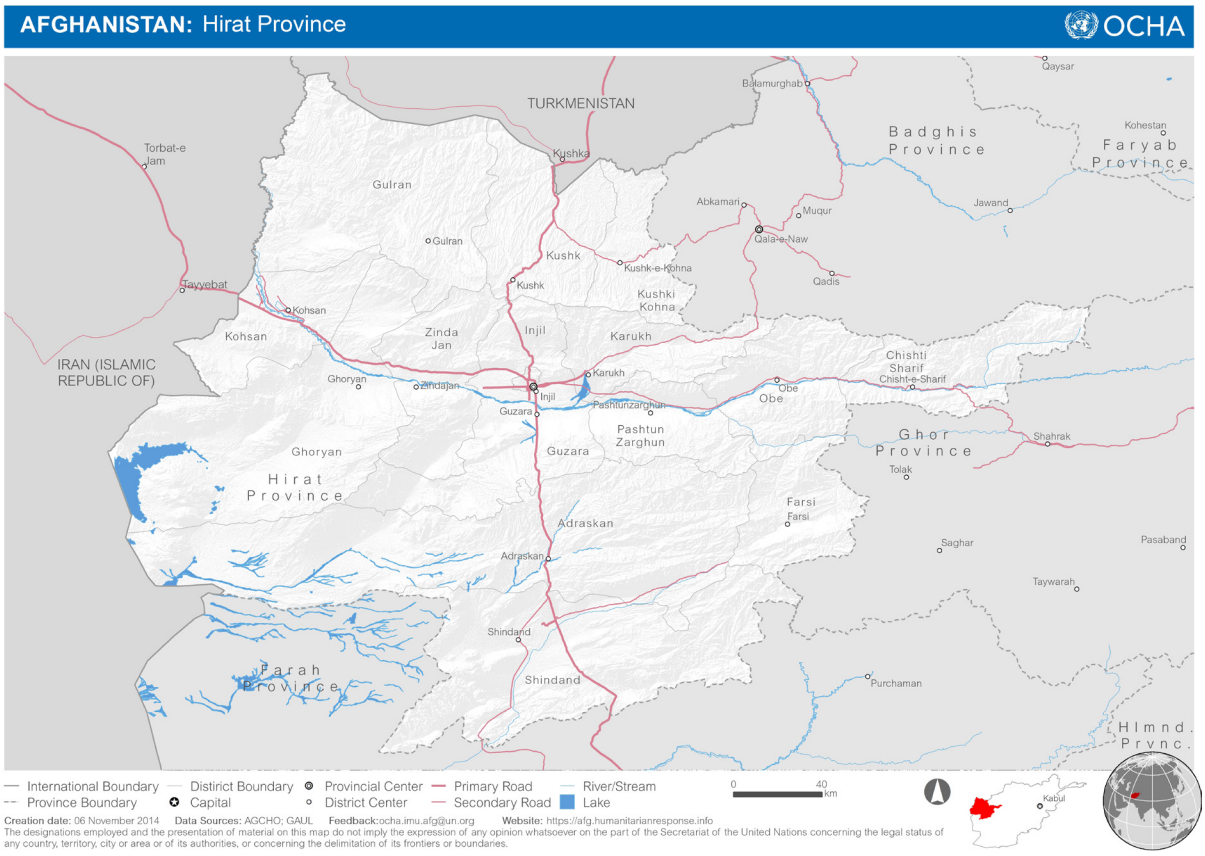
([1663]) UNHCR, Afghanistan conflict-induced internal displacement 2015: the year in review, April 2016, p. 5.

([1664]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Humanitarian Bulletin Issue 51 | 01 – 30 April 2016, 15 May 2016, p. 1.

2.8. West

2.8.1. Herat

General description of the province



Herat, located in the west of Afghanistan, is one of the largest provinces. It shares borders with the provinces of Badghis and Turkmenistan in the north. The province of Farah is to the south, while Ghor is to the east and the Islamic republic of Iran to the west ([1665]). Herat has 16 districts: Adraskan, Chiste Sharif, Farsi, Ghoryan, Gulran, Guzara, Herat, Injil, Karukh, Kohsan, Kushk, Kushke Kohna, Obe, Pashtun Zarghun, Shindand, Zinda Jan ([1666]). The provincial capital is Herat City, estimated to house 477,452 inhabitants; the population in the province is an estimated 1,890,202 ([1667]).

Background on the conflict and actors in Herat

The most unstable district is Shindand, 130 kilometres from Herat City, with an area of 6,762 square kilometres and a population of about 800,000. Shindand is Afghanistan's largest district, but it is allotted funds only equal to other districts. In June 2015, President Ghani ordered the division of the district into several districts without specifying how many ([1668]).

According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, Shindand still accounts for one-third of all security incidents in Herat Province, although the security situation in recent years has deteriorated in other areas of the province. A vast district largely populated by Pashtuns, it houses a strategically important military airbase built by the Soviets and reactivated

([1665]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Herat Province, n.d.

([1666]) Humanitarian Response, AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012.

([1667]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Population Estimate for 2015, August 2015.

([1668]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt won't talk peace from weak position, Ghani, 1 June 2015.

by the US, mainly with Iran in mind. Today, the airbase is mainly used as a training facility for Afghan pilots ([1669]). Shindand is described as a 'historic opium growing district' ([1670]). The district also has two important roads: the ring road connecting Herat with Kandahar, from which a secondary road leads towards Farah ([1671]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Herat Province counted 496 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1672]):

Violence targeting individuals	95
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	197
Explosions	41
Security enforcement	144
Non-conflict related incidents	15
Other incidents	4
Total security incidents	**496**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Herat Province ([1673]):

Shindand	154	Injil	18
Herat	68	Kushk-e Kuhna	18
Guzara	38	Chist-e Sharif	16
Gulran	25	Koshan	16
Ghoryan	23	Karukh	15
Obe	23	Zinda Jan	12
Adraskan	22	Farsi	9
Kushk	19	Khak-e Safed	1
Pashtun Zarghun	19		

Roadside bombings posed a significant threat in the province and mostly claim the lives of civilians. In the last quarter of 2015, 10 roadside bombings occurred every month. In January 2016, 27 roadside bombings were counted by the provincial council of Herat. AGEs use this tactic of planting landmines on roads to target security forces ([1674]). In April 2016, four civilians were wounded when an IED exploded in the province. In the same incident two AGEs were killed by their own explosives ([1675]).

In the first half of 2016 UNAMA reported that AGEs continued to target prominent women working in public life, including female police. On 24 January 2016, two female police officers were shot by AGEs ([1676]).

In July 2016, Herat's provincial council expressed concerns about the worsened security situation in the districts of the province. The security committee of the council stated that AGEs controlled numerous areas in different districts and their presence threatened Herat City ([1677]).

In January 2016, a man and a woman were found axed to death in **Herat City** ([1678]). Despite government efforts to eliminate criminal activities, residents of Herat City complained that such crime was increasing in the city ([1679]).

([1669]) Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, 3 July 2015.

([1670]) Edinburgh International, Afghanistan Weekly Security Report 26 February 2015, 26 February 2015; Edinburgh International, Afghanistan Weekly Security Report 5 March 2015, 5 March 2015.

([1671]) Suroush, Q., Going in Circles: The never-ending story of Afghanistan's unfinished Ring Road, 16 January 2015.

([1672]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1673]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1674]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Roadside bombings spike worries Herat people, 25 January 2016.

([1675]) Khaama Press, 2 militants blown up by own explosives in Herat province, 1 April 2016.

([1676]) UNAMA, Afghanistan 2016 Mid-Year Report Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 14.

([1677]) Tolo News, Concerns Over Insecurity Increases in Herat, 8 July 2016.

([1678]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Man, woman axed to death in Herat City, 19 January 2016.

([1679]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Herat: 19 Taliban perish, 53 criminals held in a month, 10 February 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 70 suspected criminals detained in Herat, 27 February 2016.

In April 2016, a prominent Appellate Court Chief of Herat Province was gunned down in Herat City ([1680]). UNAMA reported that on 22 May 2016 the Taliban fired multiple rockets at the Provincial Governor of Herat's compound in Herat City, killing one civilian and injuring six civilians ([1681]). In July 2016, one civilian was killed and four others wounded in a blast in Herat City ([1682]). In August 2016, the Taliban targeted and wounded a Wolesi Jirga member in a gun attack in Herat City ([1683]).

AGEs tried to overrun **Shindand** district several times. In October 2015, an attack by AGEs was repulsed by security forces ([1684]). Clashes between two rival Taliban groups, a pro-Rasool group under the command of Mullah Samad, and a group under the command of Mullah Nangyalai, supporting Mansour, erupted in December 2015 in the Zirkuh area of Shindand district ([1685]). It was reported that a group of 50 AGEs stormed police checkposts in February 2016 in Shindand. Five AGEs were killed ([1686]). Five AGEs were killed during another clash with the border police in Kalata Nazar area of Shindand district ([1687]). In March 2016, three civilians were killed by an IED in Shindand district ([1688]). In April 2016, the head of the people's council for the Shindand district was killed ([1689]). During the spring of 2016, heavy clashes between two rival insurgent groups occurred in Shindand district followed by ANSF military operations. The two groups were suspected of belonging to the local pro-Mansour Taliban group and a pro-Rasool group ([1690]). Military operations by the ANSF were reportedly successful, as 100 AGEs, including several commanders, were reported killed and 110 others injured ([1691]). But, according to Fabrizio Foschini, the government did not establish stability in Zerkuk and there is still a 'Taleban advance' in this area ([1692]). The Institute for The Study of War (ISW) stated in April 2016 that Shindand district was a stronghold for the pro-Rasool group. According to a map produced by ISW of Taliban and ISIS controlled regions, in the north of the province there is a 'low confidence Taliban support zone' which covers parts of Herat, including Shindand ([1693]). In July 2016, UNAMA stated that 'the situation in Shindand highlights another aspect of the increasingly complex and dangerous environment for civilians caught between multiple conflict-actors' ([1694]). Tolo News reported in July 2016 that the Taliban had a wide presence in Shindand and ANSF did not have 'full sovereignty in the bazar' ([1695]).

Local press reported that 200 AGEs attacked security forces in **Ghoryan** district centre in October 2015 ([1696]). At the end of March 2016, it was reported that infighting among the Taliban groups in Shindand district moved to Ghoryan district ([1697]).

In February 2016, military operations were carried out in **Kurkh** district. No reports were made of civilian casualties ([1698]).

In February 2016, a dozen AGEs surrendered their weapons and promised to participate in the peace process in **Guzra** district ([1699]). In September 2015, the Taliban kidnapped four contractors of the Etisalat Telecommunication Company for ransom money in Guzra. A week later, the Taliban killed them ([1700]).

([1680]) Khaama Press, Herat Appellate Court Chief shot dead by unknown gunmen, 28 April 2016.

([1681]) UNAMA, Afghanistan 2016 Mid-Year Report Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 40.

([1682]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 civilian killed, 5 wounded in Herat explosion, 30 July 2016.

([1683]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Lawmaker shot injured in Herat gun attack, 25 August 2016.

([1684]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban attack on Herat's Shindand district repulsed, 19 October 2015.

([1685]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 killed as rival Taliban groups clash in Herat, 7 December 2015; Khaama Press, Over 50 killed as clashes intensify among top Taliban leaders in Herat, 8 December 2015.

([1686]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Herat: 19 Taliban perish, 53 criminals held in a month, 10 February 2016.

([1687]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Over a dozen including soldiers dead in Herat, Farah clashes, 9 February 2016.

([1688]) Khaama Press, Explosion leaves 3 civilians dead in Herat province, 7 March 2016.

([1689]) Pajhwok Afghan News, People council's head for Shindand district gunned down, 6 April 2016.

([1690]) Foschini, F., Under the Mountain: A pre-emptive Taleban spring offensive in Shindand, 20 April 2016.

([1691]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 100 guerrillas eliminated in week-long Herat operation, 30 March 2016.

([1692]) Foschini, F., Under the Mountain: A pre-emptive Taleban spring offensive in Shindand, 20 April 2016.

([1693]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment: April 12, 12 April 2016.

([1694]) UNAMA, Afghanistan 2016 Mid-Year Report Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 40.

([1695]) Tolo News, Concerns Over Insecurity Increases in Herat, 8 July 2016.

([1696]) Khaama Press, Security forces fend off Taliban attack on Herat's Ghoryan District, 21 October 2015.

([1697]) Khaama Press, 5 killed in latest Taliban infighting in Herat province, 24 March 2016.

([1698]) Pajhwok Afghan News, ANA soldiers among 42 dead in clashes: MoD, 5 February 2016.

([1699]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 rebels join peace process in Herat, 10 February 2016.

([1700]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Etisalat contractors killed after being kidnapped in Herat, 19 September 2015.

On 3 September 2015, more than 100 schoolgirls fell ill after a presumed gas attack on a girl's school in **Baba Haji** district ([1701]). On 7 September 2015, more than 35 schoolgirls fell ill after a presumed gas attack on a girl's school in **Injil** district ([1702]).

Four engineers of a road construction company were shot and wounded by unidentified gunmen in November 2015 when they were travelling from **Pashton Zarghon** district to Herat City ([1703]). In April 2016, fifteen workers of the Halo Trust, a non-profit organisation, were kidnapped in **Kahistan** district. They were released the next day as a result of an operation in the province ([1704]). Seventeen civilians from **Zindjan** district were kidnapped by the Taliban on 17 April 2016. They were rescued by the police the same day ([1705]).

Displacement

Herat City shelters many internally displaced from neighbouring districts and neighbouring provinces. UNCHR mentioned in September and October 2015 that IDPs coming to Herat were mainly from districts of Badghis, Kunduz, Ghor and Faryab provinces ([1706]).

According to Fabrizio Foschini, local authorities from Shindand district stated that approximately 2,000 families of IDPs had left Zerkuh during the clashes between the two AGE groups in Shindand in the spring of 2016 ([1707]). UNOCHA carried out a mission in March 2016 to assess the situation and stated that it could not find evidence of a large number of IDPs ([1708]). Foschini claims that members of the elite or people with some previous connection there probably moved to Herat City, while the rest went to neighbouring districts of Farah or temporarily left their homes ([1709]).

In an overview of the first four months of 2016, UNHCR mentions only displacement from the provinces of Badghis and Ghor and small displacements from northern districts to Herat City ([1710]).

([1701]) Khaama Press, 115 more schoolgirls hospitalized after falling ill at school in Herat, 3 September 2015.

([1702]) Tolo News, Dozens of School Girls Poisoned in Herat,7 September 2015.

([1703]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 road engineers injured in Herat shooting, 1 November 2015.

([1704]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Abducted Halo Trust deminers freed in Herat, 2 April 2016.

([1705]) Khaama Press, Police rescue 17 civilians kidnapped by Taliban in Herat province, 9 April 2016.

([1706]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, September 2015, p. 4; UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, October 2015, p. 4.

([1707]) Foschini, F., Under the Mountain: A pre-emptive Taleban spring offensive in Shindand, 20 April 2016.

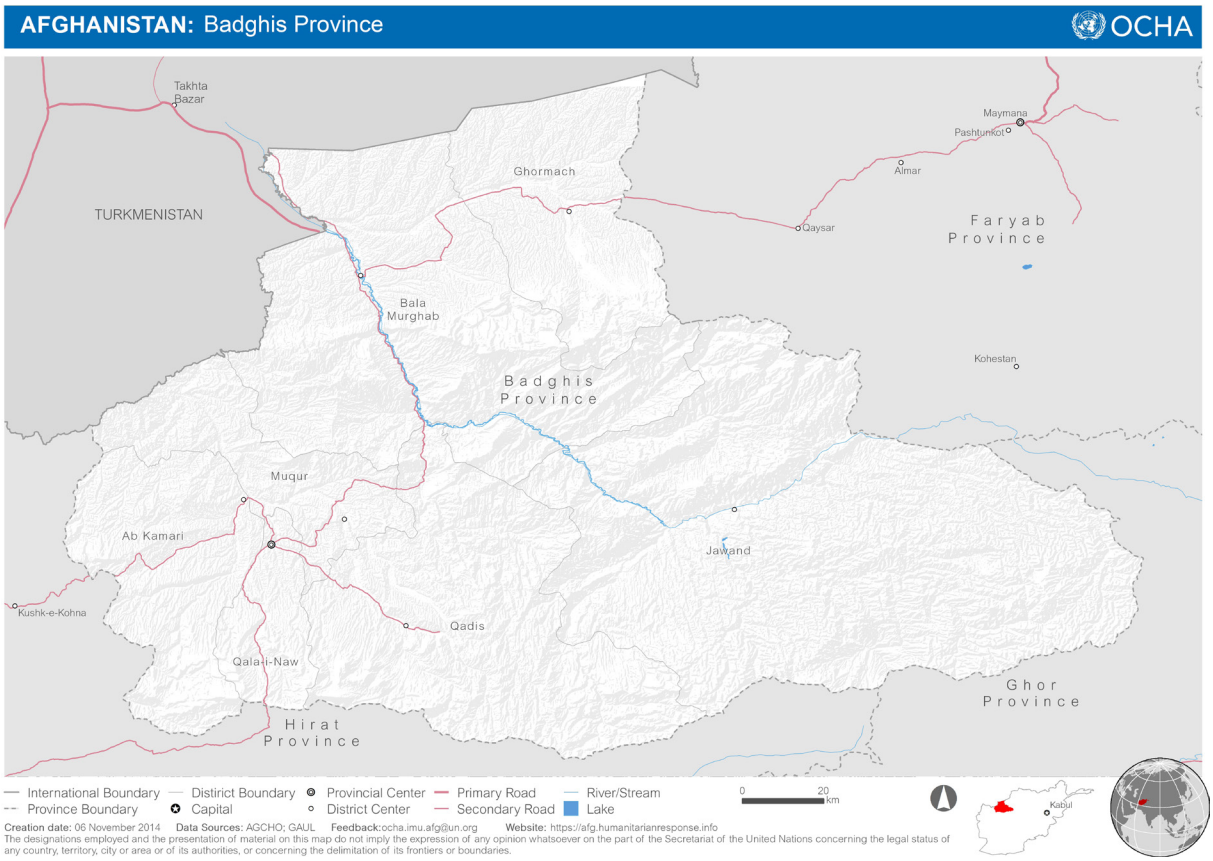
([1708]) UNOCHA, Western Region; Minutes of Humanitarian Regional Team (HRT) Meeting, 28 March 2016.

([1709]) Foschini, F., Under the Mountain: A pre-emptive Taleban spring offensive in Shindand, 20 April 2016.

([1710]) UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Conflict Induced Displacements - Snapshot (1 January - 31 April 2016), 16 May 2016.

2.8.2. Badghis

General description of the province



Badghis Province is situated in the western part of Afghanistan. The province shares its borders with Herat, Ghor, and Faryab provinces as well as with the state of Turkmenistan ([1711]). The province is mountainous and is dominated by the Murghab River in the north and the Hari-Rud River in the south ([1712]). Badghis is known for the production of pistachios ([1713]).

The province is made up of the following districts: Ab Kamari, Balamurghab, Ghormach, Jawand, Muqur and Qadis. Qala-e-Naw is the provincial capital. The main ethnic groups are Tajik and Pashtun, followed by Uzbek, Hazaras, Turkman, Arab, and Baluch. There are also Kuchi living in Balkh. The district of Bala Murghab is mostly Pashtun; the districts of Ab Kamari and Qala-i Naw mainly Tajik ([1714]). UNOCHA estimated Badghis' population at 495,958 for 2015 ([1715]). The province lacks basic infrastructure in the urban and rural areas ([1716]). AREU mentions that the roads in the province are of 'poor quality'. They are also generally unsafe because of the presence of the Taliban and bandits ([1717]).

According to reports, there are 38 health facilities in the province, including an 80-bed hospital. However, a lack of medicine and doctors was reported. It was also reported that doctors, especially gynaecologists, were reluctant to work because of the security situation ([1718]).

([1711]) UC Davis, Provincial profile for - Badghis Province, n.d.

([1712]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Badghis province, n.d.

([1713]) Tolo News, Taliban Make Millions from Badghis Pistachio Yields, 25 September 2015.

([1714]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([1715]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1716]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([1717]) AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, February 2016, p. 46.

([1718]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Badghis residents without basic health facilities, 22 June 2014; AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, February 2016, pp. 52-53.

Background on the conflict and actors in Badghis

RFE/RL reported ([1719]):

> 'Badghis Province has been a hotbed of fighting by Taliban and IMU militants since 2014, and Afghan security forces have launched several offensives since then in an attempt to drive militants out of the province. Those operations usually are launched in response to the seizure of towns or villages by the militants.'

The conflict in Badghis is mainly characterised by armed clashes between AGEs and government forces as well as periodic conflicts between rival warlords ([1720]). RFE/RL mentions that different insurgent groups are reported to be active in Badghis including foreign fighters (Uzbeks, Pakistani). They appeared to be able to gather forces of about 1,000 fighters and also infiltrate neighbouring provinces. Taliban and IMU fighters from North Waziristan in Pakistan enter Badghis through the eastern part of Herat Province ([1721]).

Most Taliban fighters are ethnic Pashtuns. The Taliban is active in the districts of Bala Murghab, Muqur and parts of Jawand and Qadis ([1722]). AREU states that: 'A recurring feature of Badghis has been that some of the local strongmen have on-and-off relations with the Taliban or have disguised their men as them' ([1723]). The Taliban has shown resilience and renewed its activities in 2015 in the province ([1724]). In May 2015, Jawand district was temporarily seized by the Taliban ([1725]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Badghis Province counted 249 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1726]):

Violence targeting individuals	31
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	185
Explosions	20
Security enforcement	10
Non-conflict related incidents	1
Other incidents	2
Total security incidents	**249**

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Badghis Province ([1727]):

Ghormach	61	Ab Kamari	26
Qadis	60	Qala-i Naw	9
Murghab	52	Jawand	5
Muqur	36		

In September 2015, three children were killed in Murqab district when a remnant of a war explosive went off ([1728]).

In October 2015, security forces launched an operation in Ab Kamari district after they received a tip of a possible attack on the provincial capital of the district. Reports were made in the same period of clashes between security forces and the Taliban in Muqur district ([1729]). During such a clash, on 17 October 2015, the Taliban's 'shadow' district chief and two ALP members were killed ([1730]).

([1719]) RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d.

([1720]) AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, February 2016, p. 45.

([1721]) RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d.

([1722]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([1723]) AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, February 2016, p. 48.

([1724]) Ruttig, T., The Second Fall of Musa Qala: How the Taleban are expanding territorial control, 3 September 2015.

([1725]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Badghis district falls to Taliban, 10 May 2015.

([1726]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1727]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1728]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Children among 6 civilians killed in Kunduz, Badghis, 7 September 2015.

([1729]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 insurgents eliminated, 3 wounded in Badghis clashes, 10 October 2015.

([1730]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban' shadow district chief killed; ALP post falls, 17 October 2015.

On 17 October 2015, the Taliban raided the district administrative centre of Ghormach. Approximately 2,000 fighters carried out attacks in the district. Among those killed were 18 AGEs, including commanders Mullah Mohiuddin, Osman and Rahmatullah and four civilians ([1731]). In the days after the raid, the Taliban captured the district after clashes with security forces ([1732]). The Taliban held control of the centre of the district for almost two months ([1733]). After heavy fighting, ANSF forces managed to repel the AGEs in December 2015 ([1734]). At the end of December 2015, it was reported that the Afghan police prevented a terrorist attack in the province ([1735]).

According to local press, the Taliban publically executed a man on adultery charges in Qadis District in January 2016 ([1736]). In February 2016, a tribal elder was tortured and executed by the Taliban ([1737]). In March 2016, fighters of the splinter group of Rasool gathered in district Qadis and announced war against fighters of the group of the (late) Mansour in Badghis. This can be explained in the light of the clashes between the two factions in Shindand district, Herat ([1738]). In March 2016, the Taliban attacked ANA troops in Bala Murghab district. Two soldiers were killed. At the same time, one ALP official was killed in an ambush by the Taliban in Muqur district ([1739]). Also in March 2016, one civilian was killed and another one wounded in a landmine blast in Qadis district ([1740]).

Clashes between the Taliban and Afghan forces continued in April 2016. One woman was reported killed ([1741]). ANSF forces reacted with operations in Badghis Province ([1742]). In April 2016, the Taliban gave a man 70 lashes after he ran away with a woman in Ab Kamari district ([1743]). The April 2016 ISW map identifies the north-west region of Badghis as a 'high confidence Taliban support zone', with two small pockets in this district are under its control ([1744]).

In May 2016, a group of young people who were travelling to the opium fields to work were targeted by an IED in Bala Murghab district; 16 were killed. Not long after this attack, another group of young people were the victims of an IED blast in Qadis district in which 11 people died ([1745]).

According to UNAMA, in the first six months of 2016, Badghis was one of the provinces in Afghanistan where ERWs caused the most civilian casualties ([1746]).

In July 2016, the Afghan Air Force conducted airstrikes on AGEs' positions in Jawand district ([1747]). In August 2016, Taliban fighters attacked security posts in Bala Murghab district. ANSF repulsed the attack with air support from the Afghan Air Force. Casualties were reported on both sides ([1748]). In the same month, according to a government official, 80 AGEs joined the reconciliation process and were recruited by the police ([1749]).

Displacement

UNHCR registrated 3, 339 families or 23, 417 individuals displaced from Badghis Province for 2015 ([1750]). Due to inter-tribal clashes in Ab Kamari in April 2015, 1,300 families moved to the provincial capital Qala-I Naw ([1751]). In the second half of 2015, according to UNHCR, more than 14,000 individuals were displaced from Ab Kamari, Muqur, Qadis and

([1731]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians among 22 killed in Ghormach clashes, 17 October 2015.

([1732]) Roggio, B., Another Afghan district falls to the Taliban, 18 October 2015.

([1733]) Tolo News, Ghormach District In Badghis Recaptured By ANSF, 24 December 2015.

([1734]) Tolo News, Ghormach District In Badghis Recaptured By ANSF, 24 December 2015.

([1735]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Terror attacks thwarted in 3 provinces, claims MoI, 30 December 2015.

([1736]) Khaama Press, Badghis Taliban execute man in public on adultery charges, 14 January 2016.

([1737]) Khaama Press, Horrific video shows Taliban torturing and executing Badghis tribal elder, 28 February 2016.

([1738]) Tolo News, Taliban's Splinter Group Rise Up Against Mansoor's Fighters in Badghis, 23 March 2016.

([1739]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 security personnel killed by Taliban in Badghis attacks, 29 March 2016.

([1740]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Blasts rock Badghis & Zabul; terror groups busted in Kandahar, 26 March 2016.

([1741]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Woman, 5 insurgents dead in Badghis clash, 12 April 2016.

([1742]) Khaama Press, 31 militants killed, 23 wounded in latest operations of Afghan forces, 23 April 2016.

([1743]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban whip Badghis man after elopement, 30 April 2016.

([1744]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment: April 12, 12 April 2016.

([1745]) Khaama Press, 16 killed in two separate explosions in Badghis province of Afghanistan, 4 May 2016.

([1746]) UNAMA, Afghanistan 2016 Mid-Year Report Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 27.

([1747]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 rebels eliminated in Badghis airstrikes, 17 July 2016.

([1748]) Pajhwok Afghan News, A dozen Taliban, policeman killed in Badghis firefight, 17 August 2016.

([1749]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 80 insurgents join reconciliation process in Badghis, 19 July 2016.

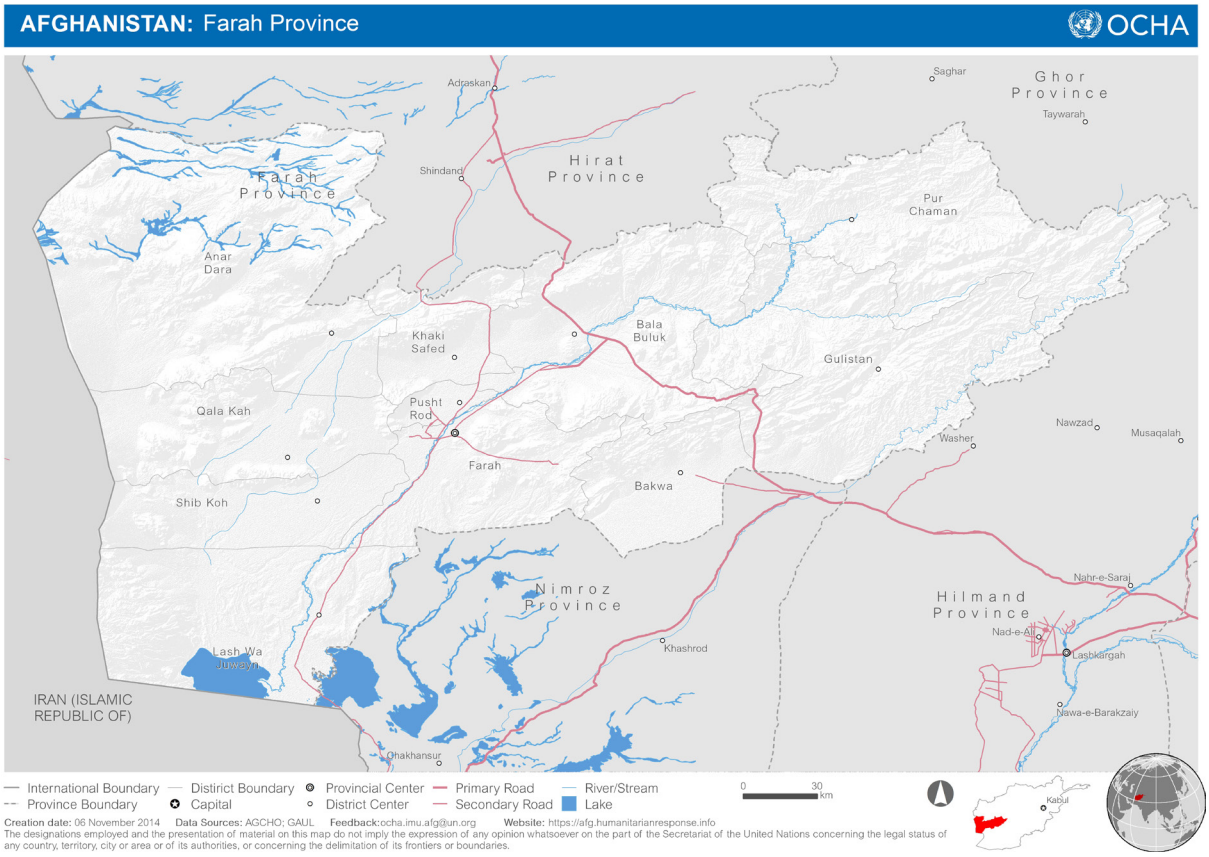
([1750]) UNHCR, Afghanistan; Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement; 2015: The Year in Review, April 2016, p. 5.

([1751]) UNHCR, Afghanistan; Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement; 2015: The Year in Review, April 2016, p. 11.

Bala Murghab districts to surrounding areas of Qala-i Naw City. Fighting between AGEs and ANSF, inter-tribal clashes, extortion and illegal taxation were reported as the main reasons for haracter displacement within Badghis ([1752]). Between 1 January 2016 and 30 April 2016, UNOCHA registrated 3, 800 individuals who fled Badghis Province ([1753]).

2.8.3. Farah

General description of the province



Farah is located in the west of the country. The province of Herat is to the north, while Ghor is to the north-east. The province of Nimroz is to the south, while Helmand is to the south-east and the Islamic republic of Iran to the west ([1754]). Farah has 10 districts: Pusht Rod, Khaki Safed, Bala Buluk, Pur Chaman, Gulistan, Bakwa, Lash WaJuwayn, Shib Koh, Pusht Koh, Anar Darah. The provincial capital is Farah City ([1755]). UNOCHA estimated Farah's population at 507,405 people for 2015 ([1756]). The population consists of Pashtun, Baluchi and Dari-speaking communities. There is also a Kuchi population in Farah, which consists of about 50,000 individuals in summer and up to 200,000 in winter ([1757]). Approximately half of the territory is semi-mountainous and the other half is flat. Farah River, a main river, runs through the province ([1758]). The economic activities in the province are agriculture, minerals, construction stones, opium, cotton, tobacco, honey, silk and handicraft ([1759]). The road between Herat and Kandahar runs through the districts of Bala Buluk and Gulistan ([1760]).

([1752]) UNHCR, Afghanistan; Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement; 2015: The Year in Review, April 2016, pp. 6, 11.

([1753]) UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Conflict Induced Displacments - Snapshot (1 January - 31 March 2016), 16 May 2016.

([1754]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Farah Province, n.d.

([1755]) Humanitarian Response, AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012.

([1756]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015.

([1757]) UC Davis, Farah, n.d.

([1758]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Farah Province, n.d.

([1759]) UC Davis, Farah, n.d.

([1760]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Farah Province District Atlas, April 2014.

Background on the conflict and actors in Farah

In recent years the security situation in Farah has developed into a fierce fight between government institutions and insurgent groups ([1761]). The Taliban is said to have a 'quick reaction force' operational in the region which covers Farah, Herat and Nimroz provinces and has a 'goal' strength of between 200 and 500 fighters. These 'quick reaction forces' are under the command of senior Taliban commanders who also act as shadow governors of key provinces ([1762]). In November 2015, in a meeting in Farah province a splinter group of the Taliban appointed its own leader, Mullah Mohammad Rasool. Rasool's faction disputes the legitimacy of the (late) Mullah Akhtar Mansour ([1763]). Fights broke out between this group and the main Taliban group under the leadership of the (late) Mullah Mansour in Farah, Zabul and Herat provinces. Mainly fighters from the splinter group were killed ([1764]). In March 2016, Taliban fighters from southern Helmand, western Farah and Nimroz provinces arrived in Herat province to reinforce the Rasool faction. The two rival factions had clashed in the district three months earlier, leaving many dead and wounded ([1765]).

Reports mention the presence of IS in Farah Province ([1766]). A former Taliban commander, Abdul Rauf Khadem, was said to have travelled to Iraq in October 2014 and has become loyal to IS. Upon his return he reportedly collected followers from the Taliban in Farah Province by paying them large sums of money ([1767]). Khadem was reportedly killed in a US drone strike in February 2015 ([1768]). The IS group in Farah is believed to be led under the command of Razaq Mehdi, a native of Herat and former subcommander of Khadem ([1769]). The UN reported in September 2015 that clashes between Taliban and IS groups occurred in Farah but on a lower scale than in the province of Nangarhar ([1770]). It was reported that, in November 2015, the Taliban carried out attacks against IS groups and succeeded in dislodging them from western Farah ([1771]).

Pajhwok Afghan News reported that war widows in Farah Province were forced to beg. Thousands of women have lost their husbands to the conflict in the province in the past three decades, particularly after 2001 ([1772]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Farah Province counted 409 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1773]):

Violence targeting individuals	82
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	198
Explosions	66
Security enforcement	54
Non-conflict related incidents	5
Other incidents	4
Total security incidents	**409**

([1761]) Foschini, F., A War of Attrition in Farah Province, 13 March 2013.

([1762]) UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, pp. 8-9.

([1763]) Tolo News, New Leader of Taliban Splinter Group Chosen in Farah, 5 November 2015.

([1764]) BBC, Why are the Taliban resurgent in Afghanistan?, 5 January 2016.

([1765]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 killed as clashes linger on between rival Taliban factions, 8 March 2016.

([1766]) USIP, The Islamic State in Afghanistan: Assessing the Threat, 7 April 2016; Al Jazeera, The Afghan battlefield has become more complicated, 1 November 2015.

([1767]) UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, p. 20.

([1768]) BBC, Afghanistan drone strike 'kills IS commander Abdul Rauf, 9 February 2015.

([1769]) USIP, The Islamic State in Afghanistan: Assessing the Threat, 7 April 2016, p. 2.

([1770]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 1 September 2015, p. 6.

([1771]) VOA, Taliban Captures IS Bases in Afghanistan, 5 January 2016.

([1772]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Many war widows in Farah forced into begging, 10 August 2016.

([1773]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Farah Province ([1774]):

Bala Buluk	146	Bakwa	9
Farah	101	Lash Wa Juwayn	9
Pusht Rod	51	Sib Koh	7
Khak-e Safed	38	Pur Chaman	6
Qala-I Kah	32	Gulistan	1
Anar Dara	9		

The Taliban has tried to seize some districts in Farah Province. For instance, in the last quarter of 2015 it has claimed it captured the districts of Gulistan ([1775]) and Baba Baluk ([1776]). According to the UN, Afghan security forces, with the help of international military support, prevented the Taliban from seizing the capital of Farah ([1777]).

During September and October 2015, AGEs showed their active presence with several attacks, such as storming police checkpoints on the Herat-Farah highway ([1778]) and police posts (district Bala Buluk) ([1779]). In October 2015, the Taliban claimed to have taken control of the district of Bala Buluk, which had previously been a Taliban stronghold ([1780]). In December 2015, two policemen were kidnapped by unknown gunmen in Farah City ([1781]).

Since the beginning of 2016, the Taliban carried out insurgent activities in Farah. The Afghan security forces responded with a military operation ([1782]). The Taliban ambushed a convoy of ANSF in January 2016 in Anar Darah. During this clash, 10 AGEs including a senior Taliban leader were killed. According to the provincial police chief, the Taliban leader killed during the gun battle was Mullah Bismillah, who was appointed as shadow district governor of Posht Koh district ([1783]). In January 2016, 8 civilians were abducted from near Kafir Kala area (Farah City) by unknown AGEs. Two of them, identified as Ihsamuddin, son of a former *Wolesi Jirga* member and a former provincial council candidate, Mohammad Arif Mohammadi,were found dead the next day ([1784]). Also in January 2016, a child was abducted from Darabad village (Farah City) by unknown gunmen for ransom money; two days later the child was found dead ([1785]). Local press reported in February 2016 that at least 40 Taliban fighters had been killed during the military operation and about 50 injured ([1786]). On 29 February 2016, four children were killed by an IED in the Karja area of Farah City ([1787]).

There were a number of reports of clashes between Taliban insurgents and Afghan forces in Pushtrud district and Bala Buluk district in the middle of April 2016 ([1788]). Casualties included Taliban and security personnel, as well as civilians, including women and children ([1789]). In order to try to counter the 'spring offensive' of the Taliban, the Afghan forces intensified operations in April 2016 in the province. For instance an air strike was carried out on 17 April 2016 in the district of Pusht Rod, killing 6 AGEs ([1790]). On 25 April 2016, the Taliban attacked an ANA base in the district of Anar Darah. Afghan security forces repulsed the attack and killed 20 AGEs. Reports did not mention any civilian casualties ([1791]). According to analyst Fabrizio Foschini: 'Taliban spring offensives in areas like Shindand or Farah, where opium production is extremely widespread, usually take place after the harvesting in late April' ([1792]). According to the ISW, from April 2016 an area covering most the province is considered a 'high confidence Taliban support zone' ([1793]).

([1774]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1775]) Reuters, Afghan forces battle to push back Taliban in Helmand, 23 December 2015.

([1776]) Roggio, B., Taliban overruns district in Farah province, 15 October 2015.

([1777]) UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 10 December 2015, p. 5.

([1778]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 police killed, 12 wounded in Farah clashes, 17 September 2015.

([1779]) Khaama Press, Dozens of policemen under siege of Taliban in Farah's Bala Buluk District, 14 October 2015.

([1780]) Roggio, B., Taliban overruns district in Farah province, 15 October 2015.

([1781]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 kidnapped policemen found dead in Farah, 26 December 2015.

([1782]) Tolo News, 40 Taliban Insurgents Killed in Farah Operation, 28 February 2016.

([1783]) Khaama Press, Senior Taliban leader killed with his 10 fighters in Farah province, 12 January 2016.

([1784]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 of 8 abducted people found dead in Farah, 2 January 2016.

([1785]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Abducted child killed in Farah; 4 kidnapped in Nimroz, 28 January 2016.

([1786]) Khaama Press, Nearly 100 Taliban insurgents killed, wounded in ongoing Farah operations, 28 February 2016; Tolo News, 40 Taliban Insurgents Killed in Farah Operation, 28 February 2016.

([1787]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 dead, 2 injured in Farah City explosion, 29 February 2016.

([1788]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 21 militants, 5 police killed in Farah clashes, 14 April 2016; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 police, 5 Taliban dead in Farah clashes, 16 April 2016.

([1789]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 21 militants, 5 police killed in Farah clashes, 14 April 2016.

([1790]) Khaama Press, 6 militants killed, 3 wounded in Afghan Air Force raid in Farah, 17 April 2016.

([1791]) Khaama Press, 20 militants killed as major Taliban offensive repulsed in Farah, 25 April 2016.

([1792]) Foschini, F., Under the Mountain: A pre-emptive Taleban spring offensive in Shindand, 20 April 2016.

([1793]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment: April 12, 12 April 2016.

On 8 May 2016, Mullah Abdul Ghani, Taliban's deputy 'shadow' governor was reportedly killed in Bala Buluk during a clash with the Afghan forces ([1794]). In May 2016, five workers of Bala Buluk district were kidnapped in Pusht Koh for ransom money. Five days later, all of them were released, reportedly after cooperation with the Taliban ([1795]). In the first half of 2016, UNAMA reported 16 incidents of conflict-related abductions in Farah ([1796]).

In July and August 2016, the Taliban conducted an offensive in Pusht Rod district, causing casualties among civilians and ANSF. The provincial council expressed concerns over the district falling into the Taliban's hands ([1797]). Also in August, the Taliban launched attacks against army posts in the district of Bala Baluk. Casualties on both sides were reported ([1798]). In Bakwa district, the Taliban executed six people, including five ANSF staff ([1799]).

Displacement

Between August 2015 and December 2015, UNHCR documented 1, 463 families (approximately 9, 355 individuals) displaced by conflict to Farah City or its surroundings. They originated from Bala Buluk, Khaki Safid, Pusht Rod, Bakwa, Qala-e-Kah, Anar Dara or the surroundings of Qala-i Naw. Military operations with frequent clashes between ANSF and AGEs were reported as the main reasons for the displacement ([1800]). Between 1 January 2016 and 30 April 2016, UNOCHA mentions 2, 200 individuals who fled Farah Province ([1801]).

([1794]) Ariana News, Taliban's deputy shadow governor for Farah killed, 9 May 2016.

([1795]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 persons freed from kidnappers in Farah, 11 May 2016.

([1796]) UNAMA, Afghanistan 2016 Mid-Year Report Protection of civilians in armed conflict, July 2016, p. 65.

([1797]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Farah's Pusht Rod at risk of falling to Taliban: public rep, 1 August 2016.

([1798]) Pajhwok Afghan News, ANA soldiers among 6 dead in Farah clashes, 31 August 2016.

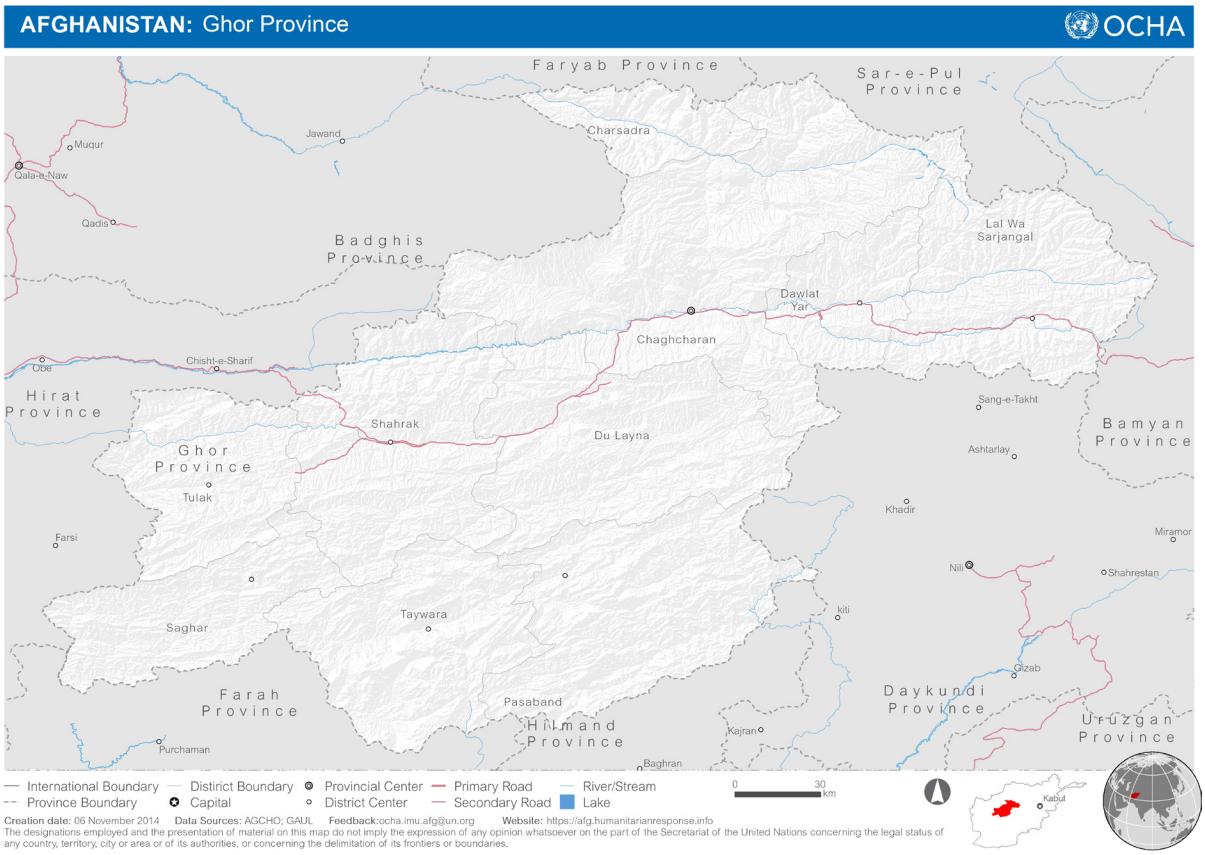
([1799]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban execute 6 including 5 security personnel in Farah, 16 August 2016.

([1800]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, August 2015; UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, September 2015; UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, October 2015; UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, November 2015.

([1801]) UNOCHA, AFGHANISTAN: Conflict Induced Displacments - Snapshot (1 January - 31 March 2016), 16 May 2016.

2.8.4. Ghor

General description of the province



Ghor Province is located in western Afghanistan and shares borders with Herat, Badghis, Faryab, Sare Pul, Bamiyan, Uruzgan, Helmand and Farah provinces. The province consists of 10 districts: Chaghcharan, Charsadra, Dawlatyar, Du Layna, Lal Wa Sarjangal, Pasaband, Saghar, Shahrak, Taywara, Tulak ([1802]). The provincial capital is Firozkoh, formerly known as Chaghcharan ([1803]). The province is estimated to have 690,296 inhabitants in an area of 38,579 square kilometres ([1804]).

The province is very mountainous and haracterized by small isolated villages which are generally inaccessible during winter. A road connecting Herat in the west with Kabul in the east cuts through the province. The province is relatively isolated, located 480 kilometres from Kabul and 386 kilometres from Herat ([1805]). This road is inaccessible for most traffic during an large part of the year and is less frequented than the road through Kandahar. Ghor is considered one of the most underdeveloped provinces of Afghanistan ([1806]). The province has a rural and tribal society and literacy is very low ([1807]). President Ghani appointed a new governor for Ghor in June 2015, one of the few female provincial governors in Afghanistan ([1808]). Due to its proximity to areas producing large amounts of opium, Ghor is the main transit route for opium from north to south. Kakori village in Pasaband is said to house the biggest opium market of Ghor ([1809]). Seasonal labourers working in Helmand's poppy fields brought their expertise and Ghor's opium cultivation is quickly expanding ([1810]).

([1802]) Humanitarian Response, AFGHANISTAN: Admin Level 3 Boundaries, based on AGCHO, 25 September 2012.

([1803]) International organization, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organization active in the province. The organization wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([1804]) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Population Estimate for 2015, 26 August 2015; International organization, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organization active in the province. The organization wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([1805]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Introduction of Ghowr Province, n.d.

([1806]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Introduction of Ghowr Province, n.d.

([1807]) WFP, Provincial Profile. Ghor, n.d.

([1808]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Ex-Lawmaker Seema replaces Rehmati as Ghor governor, 28 June 2015.

([1809]) Ali, O., "You must have a gun to stay alive": Ghor, a province with three governments, 4 August 2013.

([1810]) Ali, O., "As easy as growing potatoes": How formerly 'poppy-free' Ghor is at risk of becoming an important player in Afghanistan's opium business, 4 November 2013.

Background on the conflict and actors in Ghor

Obaid Ali (AAN) stated that '[t]he Taimani and Firuzkohi [tribes of the Chahar Aimaq] are considered the largest and most influential, but there are a great number of smaller groups, most of them of Tajik origin'. Unlike Tajik traditions in other parts of the country, tribal adherence is, among Tajiks in Ghor, more important than ethnicity. According to Ali, most Tajik tribes in Ghor are at war with each other ([1811]).

According to a source in Kabul ([1812]):

> 'Ghor province was under the control of Jamiaat-e Islami and Hezb-e Islami parties until the ouster of the Taliban. Since Hezb-e Islami was not very influential among the population, some of its members joined Jamiat. Many of the illegal armed groups (IAG) in most parts of Ghor are seen as a key force in fighting insurgents. Reports from the ground suggest that often Afghan National defense and Security Forces cooperate with IAGs in fighting Taliban in districts, such as Pasaband, Charsada, Dawlatyar, etc'.

According to the Human Rights Department of western Ghor, there are 182 illegal armed groups in Ghor, with more than 9,000 armed men. Local officials acknowledged the presence of 4,500 armed men in the province ([1813]). The Taliban is believed to have about 3,000 to 3,500 combatants there ([1814]). Officials have claimed that foreign AGEs have established a major training facility in Charsada district, leading AGEs from Ghor, Faryab and Sar-e Pul and training the Taliban fighters in bomb-making. The Taliban, which is said to be in control of all of Charsada and Dawlatyar, is also openly recruiting in these districts ([1815]).

According to Obaid Ali, ANSF lacks manpower and is ill-equipped to control these two main actors (IAG and the Taliban). ANP is said to have only 1,400 men. The neighbouring provinces of Herat and Faryab have 4,000 and 5,500 ANP respectively. The province also has a modest ALP programme with some 200 men for Du Layna and Pasaband districts only ([1816]). The total number of ANSF personnel is said to be only 2,500 ([1817]). In this disadvantaged position, police are said to be more loyal to their tribes and often refuse to operate against their kinsmen ([1818]).

Recent security trends

From 1 September 2015 to 31 May 2016, Ghor Province counted 125 security incidents. The following table provides an overview of the nature of the security incidents ([1819]):

Violence targeting individuals	31
Armed confrontations and airstrikes	61
Explosions	19
Security enforcement	9
Non-conflict related incidents	5
Total security incidents	**125**

([1811]) Ali, O., "You must have a gun to stay alive": Ghor, a province with three governments, 4 August 2013.

([1812]) International organisation, e-mail, 15 September 2015. The local contact is an international organisation active in the province. The organisation wished to remain anonymous for security reasons.

([1813]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal armed men constant threat to Ghor security, 9 January 2015.

([1814]) Ali, O., "You must have a gun to stay alive": Ghor, a province with three governments, 4 August 2013; Pajhwok Afghan News, Number of child soldiers in Ghor on the rise, 23 August 2014.

([1815]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Hundreds of foreign insurgents lead, train Taliban in Ghor, 5 August 2015.

([1816]) Ali, O., "You must have a gun to stay alive": Ghor, a province with three governments, 4 August 2013.

([1817]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Policemen among 45 killed in Ghor battle, 28 August 2014.

([1818]) Ali, O., "You must have a gun to stay alive": Ghor, a province with three governments, 4 August 2013.

([1819]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

The following table presents the number of security incidents per district in Ghor Province ([1820]):

Chaghcharan	32	Taywara	7
Shahrak	23	Saghar	5
Du Layna	19	Dawlat Yar	4
Pasaband	15	Tulak	4
Charsada	14	Lal Wa Sarjangal	2

AGEs increased their presence in the province and frequently attacked security posts in the last quarter of 2015 ([1821]). In Taywara district, more than 300 AGEs attacked several villages in the district in September 2015. Security forces repelled the attacks. In September 2015, 14 AGEs were killed during such a clash with an anti-Taliban volunteer militia ([1822]). In the same month, in Dawlatyar district, AGEs attacked a security post; eight AGEs were killed by Afghan police ([1823]). Fifty AGEs laid down their weapons and surrendered to the government in Dawleena district at the end of September 2015 ([1824]). Local press reported that, on 10 September 2015, a Taliban shadow district chief, named Yousuf Motasem, had been shot dead by one of his own bodyguards for allegedly attempting to rape the guard's wife; the Taliban publicly hanged the man ([1825]). A woman was stoned to death after being accused of adultery in October 2015 ([1826]). On 30 October 2015, AGEs attacked ALP checkpoints in Pasabad district. Three AGEs were killed ([1827]). No reports were made of civilian casualties. A group of AGEs attacked a police checkpost on the Ghor-Herat highway in November 2015 ([1828]). In November 2015, in Chaghcharan district, an armed clash erupted between AGEs and ANA and ANP, resulting in the death of five civilians ([1829]). Protests erupted in the province of Ghor ([1830]). In November 2015, a girl died following an alleged public lashing by armed groups in Shahrak district after being accused of running away from home ([1831]). In December 2015 a young boy was kidnapped by the Taliban. After a week, the boy was found dead ([1832]).

In January 2016, it was reported that a young boy, who was kidnapped three months earlier in Dara-e-Takht for ransom money, was rescued by the Afghan police ([1833]).

In March 2016, it was reported that 19 AGEs renounced violence in Ghor Province and joined the peace process. This came after 120 Taliban fighters surrendered following a military operation and joined the peace process in northern Faryab Province ([1834]).

According to ISW's April 2016 map of territorial control, an area covering the north-east part of this province, Pasaband and Du Layna district is a high confidence Taliban support zone, with a regional pocket in Du Layna district under Taliban control ([1835]).

In May 2016, Afghan forces carried out airstrikes on AGEs' hideouts in Pasaband district, killing 18 and wounded seven ([1836]). In August 2016, the Taliban attacked military posts in Pasaband causing casualties on both sides ([1837]). In the same month, three civilians were killed and eight injured by a roadside bomb near the provincial capital ([1838]).

([1820]) For more information on the source of the data and the methodology, see introduction.

([1821]) Tolo News, 50 Insurgents Renounce Violence in Ghor, 21 September 2015; Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor female governor vows to defeat Taliban, 20 October 2015.

([1822]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 rebels eliminated in Ghor clash, 5 September 2015.

([1823]) Tolo News, 50 Insurgents Renounce Violence in Ghor, 21 September 2015.

([1824]) Tolo News, 50 Insurgents Renounce Violence in Ghor, 21 September 2015.

([1825]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban district chief killed by own guard in Ghor, 10 September 2015.

([1826]) Al Jazeera, Afghan woman stoned to death for 'adultery', 4 November 2015.

([1827]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Clash ongoing as rebels storm Ghor ALP posts, 30 October 2015.

([1828]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Military commander among 7 dead in Ghor clashes, 24 November 2015.

([1829]) UNAMA, Afghanistan Annual Report 2015; Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, February 2016, p. 31.

([1830]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul, Ghor residents rally against stoning of girl, 6 November 2015.

([1831]) Tolo News, Ghor Girl Dies After 'Public Lashing', 20 November 2015.

([1832]) Tolo News, Taliban 'Brutally' Kill Young Man In Ghor, 19 December 2015.

([1833]) Tolo News, Police Rescue Kidnapped Teenager In Ghor, 31 January 2016.

([1834]) Tolo News, 19 Insurgents Renounce Violence In Ghor, 1 March 2016.

([1835]) ISW, Afghanistan Partial Threat Assessment: April 12, 12 April 2016.

([1836]) Khaama Press, 18 killed, 7 wounded in Afghan Air Force raids in Ghor province, 15 May 2016.

([1837]) Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 dead in hours-long Pasaband gun-battle, 24 August 2016.

([1838]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Woman, child among 3 civilians killed in Ghor bomb blast, 29 August 2016.

Pajhwok Afghan News reported in August 2016 that, as a result of continued fighting and roadblocks, the population of Pasaband district ran out of food and fuel supplies which caused famine. The district had been surrounded by AGEs for four months already ([1839]).

Displacement

In this reporting period, conflict-induced displacement took place from different districts in Ghor to the provincial capital and district centres of Shahrak and Du Layna, but also to neighbouring provinces, mainly Herat. Notable districts of origin were Shahrak, Du Layna, Pasaband and Chaghcharan. Reasons for displacement were generalised violence, armed conflict between AGEs and ANSF and inter-tribal conflicts, as well as intimidation, threats, kidnapping and targeted killing of those affiliated to the government and extortion and forced recruitment by AGEs ([1840]).

([1839]) Pajhwok Afghan News, Famine threatens Ghor's Pasanad residents, security forces, 16 August 2016.

([1840]) UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, September 2015, p. 4; UNHCR, Afghanistan: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Monthly Update, October 2015, p. 4; UNHCR, Afghanistan; Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement; 2015: The Year in Review, April 2016, p. 3.

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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The goal of this report is to provide security-related information relevant for international protection status determination (refugee status and subsidiary protection).

An important goal of this report is to provide details on a regional, provincial or even district level.

The reporting period for incidents and events illustrating the general trends of the conflict, is 1 September 2015 until 31 August 2016.

The content of the report should contain information on the following topics:

General description of the security situation

Introduction

Short history of the conflict(s)

Parties to the conflict

State's armed forces (army, police, intelligence…)

Components
Tasks/roles
Numbers in total
Casualties
Defecting (as indication of strength/weakness)

Armed groups (pro-government, opposition…)

Components
Level of organisation (cf. mentioning Report Afghan Analyst Network)
Numbers in total
Casualties
Defecting (as indication of strength/weakness)

International military forces (transition)

Armed confrontations (trends)

As intro to regional chapter
E.g., fighting tactics, attacks, military operations, guerilla
Use of weapons
Both qualitative and quantitative

Geographical overview of the security situation

- transition to next chapter; demonstrate clear geographical differences between level of violence
- use of maps
- urban/rural

Impact of violence on state ability to secure Law & Order

- Government institutions
- Court system
- Rural/urban divide

Refugees and returnees

Detailed regional description of the security situation

Description that goes into regional details, e.g. per province, district, cities…

Level of detail depending on province but some consistency needed.

By region/province, possibly with separate focus on some contested areas:

First distinction per region: (Cf. UNAMA)

- North
- North East
- West
- Central
- Central Highlands
- South
- South-East

Then per province

Try to define zones within province when describing levels of violence

Some provinces are safer, so need less detail. Other provinces need more detail.

Short description of the province

Terrain (short); main roads

Urban areas

Population (including numbers); ethnicity (indicative, no real figures, qualitative)

Map (UNOCHA) with districts, roads and neighbouring provinces

Quantitative data

Number of incidents

Number of victims (death and injured)

Civilians

Military staff/fighters

Humanitarian organisations

Number of population displacements

Direct impacts of violence

Overview of **major/significant incidents** in the province (chronology, not exhaustive and for very violent provinces it needs to be specified that no chronology is possible due to too many incidents)

Frequency of the incidents

Anti-government **elements active** in the region

Weapons and tactics used

Depending on occurrence of information, refer to chronology
Insofar as possible: info on type of weapons / tactics: targeted vs indiscriminate
Only effective use of violence, not potential, e.g. cache of weapons found

Examples may relate to:

- Bombings
  - Artillery and mortars
  - Air raids
  - Massive bombings
- Explosives
  - Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)
    - roadside bombs (VOIED, RCIED)
    - car and suicide bombs (VBIED, BBIED)
  - Landmines
- Shootings
  - Direct confrontations/ground battles
  - Snipers
  - Death squads and executions
- Guerilla attacks/asymmetric warfare/multiple and complex attacks
- Surprise attacks/sweeps/raids
- Siege
- Terre brûlée
- Intimidation and threats
  - Checkpoints/freedom of movement
  - Kidnappings
  - Limitations to participation in public life
  - Forced recruitment
  - Illegal taxation
  - Sexual violence as a war strategy
  - Lootings
- Criminal activities related to the conflict (e.g. in case of breakdown of law and order)

Targets

If info available differentiates between, e.g.:

- Civilian targets and population
- Military targets
- Government infrastructure
- Humanitarian organisations

Affected areas

If info available differentiates between, e.g.:

- Urban areas and dwellings
- Crowded/public places
  - Markets, shops
  - Schools
  - Places of worship and recreation
  - Hospitals
  - Cultural property
- Roads and transport systems
  - Roads
  - Airfields
  - Stations

Secondary impact of the violence (directly linked to violence; excluding e.g. natural disasters, corruption, cultural issues, etc.)

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