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European Asylum Support Office

Afghanistan Anti-Government Elements (AGEs)

Country of Origin Information Report



SUPPORT IS OUR MISSION



Afghanistan

Anti-Government Elements (AGEs)

Country of Origin Information Report

August 2020

More information on the European Union is available on the Internet (<http://europa.eu>).

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11 April 2011 [url](#) CC BY 2.0

Taliban fighters met with Government of the Republic of Afghanistan officials in Kandahar City, 11 April 2011, and peacefully surrendered their arms as part of the government's peace and reintegration process.

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

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
Contents	5
Disclaimer	7
Glossary and abbreviations.....	8
Introduction	9
Terms of Reference.....	9
Methodology.....	9
Structure and use of the report.....	9
Map	10
1. General overview	11
1.1 Anti-Government Elements (AGEs)	11
1.2 Negotiations on the Doha Agreement with the Taliban.....	12
1.2.1 Motivations and targeting patterns since the Doha Agreement.....	13
2. The Taliban	16
2.1 Structure and leadership.....	16
2.2 Strength, presence, territorial control, and capacity	19
2.3 Objectives.....	20
2.4 Recruitment strategies	21
2.4.1 Child recruitment	21
2.5 Human rights violations and abuses.....	21
2.6 Targeted individuals	22
2.6.1 Members of the Afghan security forces and pro-government militias	22
2.6.2 Government officials and those perceived as supporting the government	24
3. Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).....	29
3.1 Structure and leadership.....	29
3.2 Strength, presence, territorial control, capacity.....	30
3.3 Objectives.....	32
3.4 Recruitment strategies	33
3.5 Human rights violations and abuses.....	34
3.6 Targeted individuals and recent attacks	34
3.6.1 Hazara Shia	34
3.6.2 Sikhs.....	34
3.6.3 Other examples of treatment of opponents, including perceived ‘infidels’, ‘apostates’, spies or other insurgents.....	35

4. Other AGEs	36
4.1 Haqqani network.....	36
4.2 Al Qaeda and affiliates.....	37
4.3 Foreign AGEs and fighters	38
Annex I: Bibliography	40
Annex II: Terms of Reference	52

Disclaimer

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

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

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

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

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

The drafting of this report was finalised 18 June 2020. 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.europa.eu>.

Glossary and abbreviations

AAN	Afghanistan Analysts Network
AGE	Anti-Government Element
AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
Apostasy	The act of leaving Islam; a <i>hudud</i> crime punishable by death under sharia
<i>Emir</i>	Arabic word used for a commander
<i>fatwa</i>	A ruling or opinion given by the head of a religious community in Islam
Hazara	An ethnic group who are mainly Shia
Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan	The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was the state in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 under the Taliban ruling government. The Taliban still uses this name to refer to itself.
ISKP	Islamic State in Khorasan Province; affiliates of ISIL based in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Also called ISK.
<i>Jihad</i>	Islamic ‘holy war’
<i>Kafir, kufr, kofaar</i>	An ‘unbeliever’ in Islam; label those deemed anti-Islamic; ‘foreign infidels’
<i>Kangaroo court</i>	A tribunal outside statutory judicial authorities that does not follow official legal procedures
<i>Layeha</i>	Taliban’s code of conduct
Local Uprising Forces	Government-supported local militia groups that fight against the Taliban and ISKP
<i>Mullah</i>	Islamic cleric (teachers and preachers) who studied in a madrasa. In Afghanistan they are very prevalent outside the cities and usually the single religious authority in a village. They can often read Arabic and the Koran ²
Quetta Shura	A concept describing the most senior group of Taliban leaders
<i>Sharia</i>	The religious law of Islam; Islamic canonical law
<i>Shura</i>	A decision-making community council; often formed for non-state dispute settlement; made up of a group of people with community authority (elders) to discuss and find solutions to a problem ³
<i>Tarjoman</i>	Interpreters

² Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., Mullah, 2 April 2014, [url](#)

³ ALEP, Stanford Law School, Introduction to the Criminal Law of Afghanistan, 2012, [url](#), p. 76

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide relevant information for the assessment of international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection. This report is meant to be read in conjunction with other 2020 EASO COI reports on Afghanistan, which provide relevant information regarding topics such as state structure and security forces, customary justice and informal dispute resolution, targeted violence, security situation and armed conflict developments, key socio-economic indicators.

The report provides an overview of the main Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) in Afghanistan, primarily the Taliban and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), with a focus on describing the modus operandi, structure and activities of these groups with respect to targeted killings and attacks on particular profiles.

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference (ToR) of this report were defined by EASO based on discussions held with and input received from COI experts in the EASO COI specialist network on Afghanistan and from policy experts in EU+ countries⁴ within the framework of a country guidance development on Afghanistan. Terms of reference for this report can be found in [Annex II](#).

Methodology

This report is produced in line with the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019)⁵ and the EASO COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019).⁶

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 18 June 2020. Minor clarifications and some minor additional information were added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 27 July 2020. Some additional information was also added as a result of input received from co-director at the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), Kate Clark, during an online interview held with EASO on 27 July 2020.

Sources in Pashto and Dari used in this report were duly assessed and informally translated by a native speaker within EASO.

Structure and use of the report

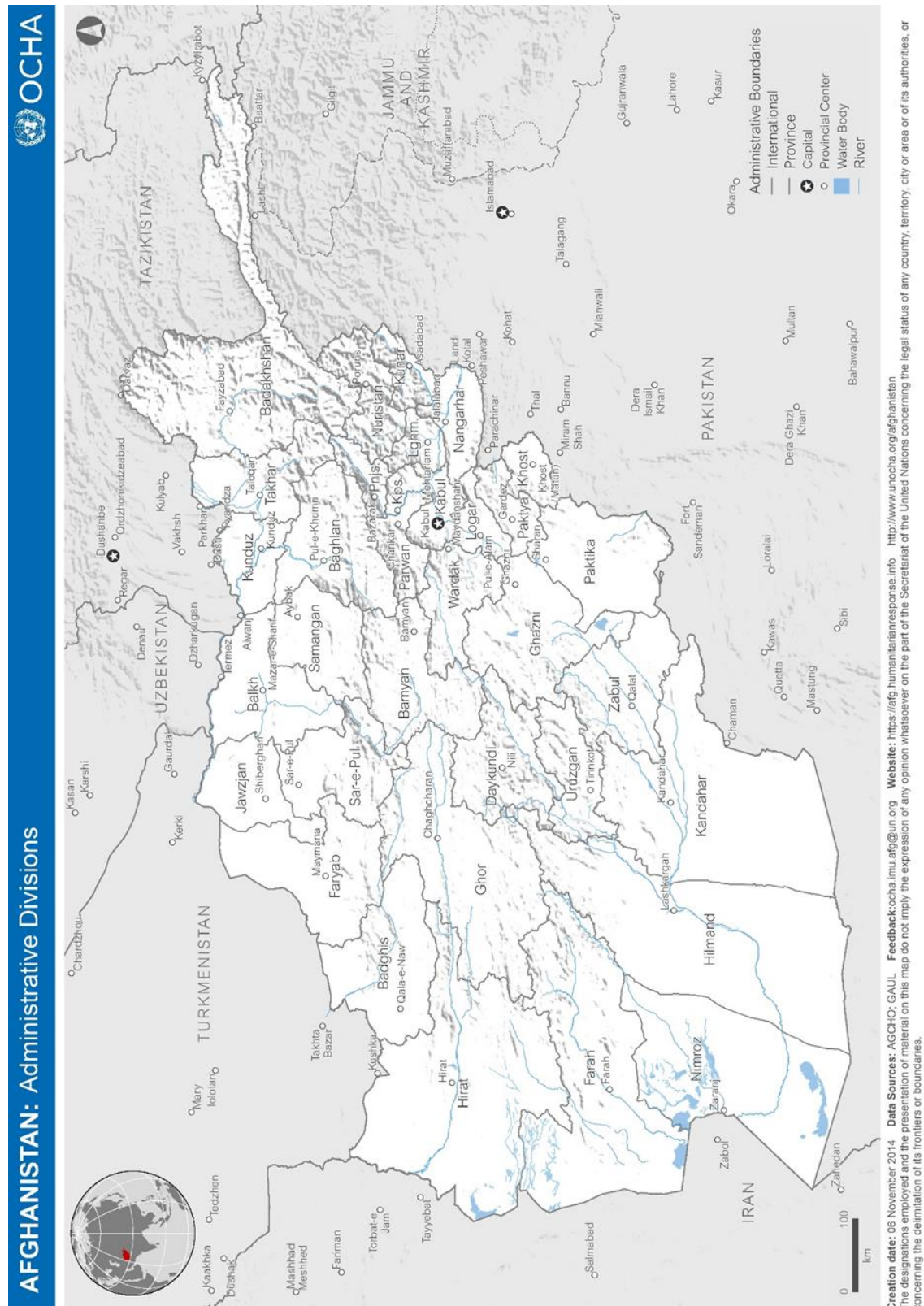
The report is divided into four sections: Section 1 provides a general overview of the situation relating to armed conflict and AGEs, as well as recent developments on the Doha agreement with the US government and the Taliban; Section 2 provides information on the main points of the structure and modus operandi of the Taliban and main targeted profiles related to this group; Section 3 provides information on the ISKP and main targeted profiles; Section 4 provides an overview of other AGEs operating in Afghanistan, such as Al Qaeda, Haqqani Network and Foreign AGEs.

⁴ EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland

⁵ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

⁶ EASO, Writing and Referencing Guide for EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, [url](#)

Map



Map 1: Afghanistan - administrative divisions, source: UNOCHA⁷

⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - administrative divisions, January 2014, [url](#)

1. General overview

1.1 Anti-Government Elements (AGEs)

According to the Rule of Law in Armed Conflict Project (RULAC)⁸, there are multiple overlapping non-international armed conflicts happening in Afghanistan between government forces and AGEs, mainly against the Taliban (and associated Haqqani Network) and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), among others.⁹ The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) defines AGEs as parties to the conflict, describing them as follows:

‘Anti-Government elements include members of the “Taliban” as well as other non-State organized armed groups taking a direct part in hostilities against Pro-Government Forces including the Haqqani Network, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkari Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed, groups identifying themselves as Islamic State/“Daesh” and other militia and armed groups pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives including armed criminal groups directly engaged in hostile acts on behalf of other Anti-Government Elements.’¹⁰

In 2019, AGEs were the continuing cause of the majority of civilian casualties through indiscriminate and deliberate targeting of civilians, in violation of international humanitarian law. In its annual report on civilian protection, UNAMA documented 10 392 civilian casualties in 2019¹¹; of those, 6 447 civilian casualties (1 668 killed and 4 779 injured) were attributed to AGEs¹², in particular 76 % to the Taliban, 19 % to ISIL-KP, and 5 % to undetermined AGEs.¹³

A key development impacting this report are the ‘efforts made to establish a peace process initially through talks’ between the Taliban and the US government in February 2020.¹⁴ The Doha Agreement signed on 29 February 2020 has been described as a ‘negotiated political settlement’ rather than a comprehensive peace deal.¹⁵ SIGAR quoted NATO Resolute Support (RS) mission stating that ‘enemy-initiated attacks’¹⁶ by insurgents considerably increased in late 2019, in the run up to talks with the US.¹⁷ UNAMA also noted the increase in violence prior to talks, and reported that during the third quarter of 2019, it recorded the highest ever number of civilian casualties since ‘systematic documentation’ began, mainly due to indiscriminate Taliban attacks on civilians and elections.¹⁸

Civilian casualties dropped in the first quarter of 2020 (compared to 2019’s first quarter, and they were the lowest since 2012): UNAMA documented 1 293 civilian casualties (533 killed), with the continuing trend that AGEs remained responsible for most of them (55 %), the majority of which were attributed

⁸ RULAC project is a legal reference source produced by the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights that qualifies situations of armed violence in accordance with the definitions under applicable international law. RULAC, About RULAC, Last updated 5 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹ RULAC, Non-international armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Last updated 30 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 84

¹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-6

¹² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 32

¹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 33

¹⁴ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁵ US, CRS, Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief, 1 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3; see also for further details on the deal’s provisions: Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶ SIGAR defines ‘Enemy-initiated attacks’ as “all attacks (direct -re, indirect -re, surface-to-air -re, IED, and mine explosions, etc.) initiated by insurgents that the ANDSF and RS consider to be [significant activities] (SIGACTs).” SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, available at [url](#), p. 68

¹⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, available at [url](#), p. 68

¹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 33

to the Taliban (39 %) and ISKP (13 %).¹⁹ Overall, in the first quarter of 2020, casualties initially rose, then dropped during the ‘Reduction in Violence’ (RiV) period (an 8-day period in February 2020 prior to talks between the US and Taliban), and increased again after the Doha deal was signed (see Section [1.2 Negotiations on the Doha Agreement with the Taliban](#)).²⁰ The Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) noted that the casualty figures could be blurred as there is a ‘practical lack of distinction between fighters and civilians’ in the conflict.²¹ UNAMA stated in April 2020 that it was ‘gravely concerned’ by the acceleration of violence in March, following the RiV, mainly by Taliban forces against ANSF.²²

The Taliban still retained close relations with affiliated groups, such as the Haqqani Network and Al-Qaeda ‘based on friendship, a history of shared struggle, ideological sympathy and intermarriage’. Al-Qaeda’s senior leadership in Afghanistan remained intact with hundreds of fighters.²³ In addition to their handling of any threat posed by Al-Qaeda, ‘the Taliban’s credibility as a counter-terrorism partner for the international community will rest on their success in countering the threat from ISIL-K.’²⁴

Other foreign terrorist fighters and groups are also present in Afghanistan, including up to 6 500 Pakistanis.²⁵ There are roughly 20 militant groups active in Afghanistan, including ‘Pakistani extremist groups like the Pakistani Taliban, Lashkar-e Jhangvi, Lashkar-e Taiba, Jaish-e Muhammad, and Central Asian militant groups including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Islamic Jihad Union, and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, a militant group fighting for Uyghur independence in China’ some of which operate under the Taliban umbrella.²⁶ However, the Taliban denied the presence of any foreign fighters in Afghanistan as of June 2020.²⁷

1.2 Negotiations on the Doha Agreement with the Taliban

After 18 years of war between the US and the Taliban, on 29 February 2020, they signed an agreement in Doha²⁸ to withdraw US troops in exchange for the Taliban agreeing not to work with Al-Qaeda and to enter talks with the Afghan government.²⁹ However, the Afghan government was not involved in the deal, with the Taliban later refusing to engage with the Afghan government’s negotiating team, leading to questions about the viability of the agreement and likelihood it will lead to peace.³⁰ A week before signing the deal, an 8-day long ‘reduction in violence’ (RiV) period successfully saw a significant drop in security incidents. However, after the RiV ended with the signature of the deal, the Taliban stated that ‘the war would continue’ not against foreign troops, but the Afghan government.³¹ The

¹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – First Quarter Report: 1 January – 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 1-2

²⁰ See the graphic ‘Civilian Casualties Timeline by Party to the Conflict’ on page 2: UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – First Quarter Report: 1 January – 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 1-2

²¹ Kazemi, R., Disputed Casualties in Kushk: The cost of blurring lines between fighters and civilians, 24 February 2020, [url](#)

²² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – First Quarter Report: 1 January – 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, [url](#), p. 3

²³ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3

²⁴ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²⁵ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3

²⁶ RFE/RL, The Taliban, The Government, and Islamic State: Who Controls What in Afghanistan, 31 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁷ Roggio, B., Analysis: Taliban again denies presence of foreign fighters in Afghanistan, LWJ, 8 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁸ For a detailed explanation of the Doha Agreement and stipulations, see UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#)

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

³⁰ US, CRS, Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief, 1 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3; see also for further details on the deal’s provisions: Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

³¹ AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended? 21 March 2020, [url](#)

Taliban's Military Commission (described in Section [2. The Taliban](#)) has also reportedly sought assurances from the main Taliban leadership that fighting will continue regardless of the agreement.³²

The two main components of the deal are that there are guarantees to remove all foreign military forces from Afghanistan through a phased approach over 135 days; while in exchange, there should be mechanisms to prevent Afghanistan from being used by groups (specifically the Taliban and Al Qaeda) or individuals posing security threats to the US and its allies. It also stipulated that intra-Afghan negotiations toward 'real peace talks' would take place in March 2020, leading to a permanent and sustainable ceasefire and agreement on Afghanistan's political future. However, AAN observed in March 2020 that there are 'few obligations' placed on the Taliban under the deal.³³ Taliban prisoner release deals also led to concerns of a return to violence.³⁴

In tandem with the Doha Agreement, the US signed a 'joint declaration' with the Government of Afghanistan, to enable political settlement and a permanent ceasefire between the Afghan government and the Taliban, while also affirming continued support to the Afghan security forces and refraining from intervention in domestic affairs.³⁵ In mid-June 2020, the Taliban and the Afghan government finally agreed on Doha as the venue for their first session of high-level 'intra-Afghan dialogue' but held off confirmation pending disagreements over prisoner releases.³⁶

1.2.1 Motivations and targeting patterns since the Doha Agreement

According to the US, the Taliban have not launched any attacks on international forces since the deal was made in February; however, they have increased their attacks on Afghan government forces.³⁷ In a report on violence patterns in the four weeks since the 8 days of RiV agreed under the US-Taliban deal, AAN concluded that 'the only civilians to have benefitted from the US-Taliban deal appear to be those living in Taliban-controlled areas' where the US and Afghan forces took a 'defensive stance' and stopped air strikes and night raids; however, in contested areas, the report found that many civilians said the Taliban were renewing attacks, and there was fear of 'possible intensifying conflict'.³⁸ Violence resumed immediately after the RiV ended.³⁹ The Taliban continued their attacks against the ANSF (over 76 attacks in 24 provinces within a week of signing the agreement) despite the deal.⁴⁰ The US also resumed airstrikes⁴¹, the first of which came 5 days after the deal.⁴²

AFP stated that since the US-Taliban agreement, Taliban attacks have been less frequent in cities but have continued to target Afghan government forces in rural areas; for example, a Taliban attack killed 11 pro-government militiamen in June 2020.⁴³ After a brief ceasefire for Eid at the end of May 2020, sources cited by the Long War Journal (LWJ)⁴⁴ indicated that the Taliban increased their attacks again in June 2020, stepping up assaults on government forces.⁴⁵ In mid-June 2020, the Ministry of Interior

³² UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 4

³³ Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁴ Afghanistan Times, More violence feared as freed Taliban inmates may return to the battlefield, 14 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁵ Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁶ Reuters, Afghan government, Taliban agree to Doha as venue for first peace talks, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁷ Reuters, Taliban Militants Kill Afghan Regional Police Chief in Latest Attack, 8 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁸ Clark, K., Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (2): Assessing the conflict a month after the US-Taliban agreement, AAN, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁹ Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰ New York Times (The), Taliban ramp up attacks on Afghans after Trump says "no violence", 6 March 2020, [url](#); Reuters, U.S. Forces conduct airstrikes on Taliban in Afghanistan, 5 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴¹ Military Times, US resumes airstrikes against Taliban to halt attack on Afghan forces, 4 March 2020, [url](#); Reuters, U.S. Forces conduct airstrikes on Taliban in Afghanistan, 5 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴² Military Times, US resumes airstrikes against Taliban to halt attack on Afghan forces, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴³ AFP, Bomb Blamed on Taliban Kills 11 Pro-govt Afghan Militiamen, 6 June 2020, [url](#); See also: AFP, Attack blamed on Taliban kills seven Afghan policemen, 14 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴ LWJ is a project of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, and is dedicated to providing original analysis and reporting about the Global War on Terror. It is a non-profit organization, for more info see: LWJ, About, n.d. [url](#)

⁴⁵ Roggio, B., Taliban ramps up attacks after ending unilateral ceasefire, LWJ, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

claimed that the Taliban carried out over 200 attacks killing or wounding more than 400 security personnel in the beginning of June.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the New York Times reported that in June 2020, 322 pro-government security personnel and 159 civilians were killed.⁴⁷

When looking at targeting patterns in 2019 and the first quarter of 2020, AGEs continued to carry out targeted killings, disappearances, and attacks on those who oppose them or spoke out against them.⁴⁸ After ground engagements, the main source of civilian casualties were targeted/deliberate killings at 26 % of casualties in 2020.⁴⁹ AGEs, mainly the Taliban, continued to carry out the vast majority of targeted conflict-related abductions of civilians, with UNAMA documenting 218 cases, affecting over 1 000 civilians and killing 50, during 2019.⁵⁰ UNAMA reported that compared to the first quarter of 2019, in the first quarter of 2020, there was a 'disturbing increase' in targeted killings and summary executions, mainly carried out by the Taliban. Targeted killing was the main cause of civilian death, ahead of ground engagements, in the first quarter of 2020. Most of those affected were in Kabul, Balkh, and Faryab.⁵¹ In its latest report published in July 2020, UNAMA attributed 43 % of civilian casualties to the Taliban during the first six months of 2020.⁵² The Taliban have repeatedly formally rejected UN reporting as biased, denying the attribution of civilian casualties by UNAMA to the group,⁵³ while they regularly report on civilian casualties⁵⁴ caused by enemy shelling,⁵⁵ night raids and airstrikes, which they state to be the main cause of civilian casualties instead.⁵⁶

Since the agreement, a number of violent attacks killing civilians have also remained unclaimed, or, the perpetrators are suspected by officials to have been ISKP, Taliban, or Haqqani, without any group taking responsibility.⁵⁷ Some Afghan officials have accused the Haqqani network of being behind some attacks claimed by ISKP (See Section 3. Islamic State Khorasan Province). An Afghan government security assessment from May 2020 described in the media said that unclaimed attacks by the Taliban or Haqqani allow the blame to be shifted to ISKP which saves the Taliban from criticism or repercussions.⁵⁸ Other examples of unattributed targeted killings include:

- A string of unclaimed killings and attacks in Afghanistan on 13 June 2020 by unknown perpetrators left 17 dead, including 8 in Khost, such as Abdul Wali Ekhlas, a candidate in 2019 parliamentary elections who did not win a seat⁵⁹, and a pro-government cleric in Kabul, as well as members of security forces.⁶⁰
- On 30 March 2020, a female general, head of NDS's Gender Department was killed in a targeted car bomb in Kabul City.⁶¹ No group claimed responsibility.⁶²

⁴⁶ AFP, Over 400 Afghan security men killed or hurt in past week, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 – Afghanistan, March 2019, [url](#), p. 2; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – First Quarter Report: 1 January – 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – First Quarter Report: 1 January – 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 46-47

⁵¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – First Quarter Report: 1 January – 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-4

⁵² UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 8

⁵³ Voice of Jihad, Remarks by spokesman of Islamic Emirate concerning civilian casualty report by UNAMA, 27 July 2020 [url](#);

Voice of Jihad, Reaction of spokesman of Islamic Emirate concerning civilian casualty report by UNAMA, 27 April 2020, [url](#);

Voice of Jihad, First Quarterly (January, February, March) Civilian Casualty Report for 2020, 3 May 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁴ Voice of Jihad, Why are war crimes ignored?, 5 July 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁵ Voice of Jihad, Video Report: Enemy shelling of civilian homes in Baghlan, 13 July 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁶ Voice of Jihad, Remarks by spokesman of Islamic Emirate concerning civilian casualty report by UNAMA, 27 July 2020 [url](#)

⁵⁷ RFE/RL/Radio Free Afghanistan, Afghan Mosque Attacks Kill 13 Worshippers Breaking Fast, 20 May 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Civilians suffer casualties in an explosion in Jalalabad city of Afghanistan, 14 June 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, At Least 17 Killed in Attacks Across Afghanistan, 13 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸ TSG, Taliban, Haqqani, LeT, Jaish plan to target high profile Kabul entities, 24 May 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁹ AP, 18 people killed in separate attacks in Afghanistan, 13 June 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, At Least 17 Killed in Attacks Across Afghanistan, 13 June 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰ RFE/RL, At Least 17 Killed in Attacks Across Afghanistan, 13 June 2020, [url](#)

⁶¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶² Khaama Press, US Embassy reacts to death of senior female Afghan intelligence official in Kabul, 1 April 2020, [url](#)

- On 10 April 2020, the Imam of Hazrat Ali mosque in Farah Province was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen.⁶³

Referring to a spike in targeted killings in Herat from October 2019 to January 2020, AAN also described dynamics such as ‘complex rivalries’ among local and provincial elites, some of whom may be implicated in targeted killings and attacks to settle scores between rivals through the politicising of criminal/security incidents, while these killings may be obscured by the prevalence of the Taliban’s targeting patterns.⁶⁴

In conversation with EASO during the finalisation of this report, on 27 July 2020, AAN’s co-director Kate Clark gave some insights into changes in tactics by the Taliban and the series of unclaimed attacks which occurred after the US-Taliban agreement. She noted:

‘We have a Taliban spring offensive in all but name. The leadership is encouraging fighters to fight as hard as possible. That’s being taken up enthusiastically by some commanders, but not all. In some areas, there appears to be a ‘go slow’ response to the ‘jihad’, with weak responses to calls to muster for operations. Some field commanders have also expressed a wish that their leadership was seriously pursuing peace with the government.

For the Taliban leadership, the main aim is getting the US out, so a lot of their strategy this year can be explained as them carrying on with the war without antagonising the Americans too much. After the 29 February agreement was signed, the US reminded the Taliban that they had agreed verbally to reduce violence by 80 %. The Taliban replied that they had only agreed not to attack US forces, not to attacks the big cities, not to attack bases, but they were free to attack everything else. So, they appear to be fighting without crossing certain red lines which would antagonise the US military and risk drawing it back into the conflict. So tactics are somehow different this year: we see an increase in the use IEDs, targeted killings and abductions and harassing road users, including taxing them. There have also been a number of very strange unclaimed attacks; mostly nasty urban attacks. These could have been carried out by ISKP, although it would be surprising since they usually claim everything they do. Or it could be the Taliban. Such attacks are banned under the Taliban’s oral agreement with the US, but the Taliban might want to carry them out without claiming responsibility: they do successfully terrorise civilians in government-held urban areas and might, also, satisfy demands from Taliban’s donors, who want for example, sectarian attacks on Hazaras.’⁶⁵

⁶³ Pajhwok, Religious scholar gun down in Farah, 10 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁴ Kazemi, R., Herat City’s Reported Spike in Insecurity: What a sober reading of events reveals, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁵ Clark K., AAN, online video interview with EASO, 27 July 2020

2. The Taliban

The Taliban is an AGE that has been active in Afghanistan for decades. The Taliban leadership ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 when it was removed from power by US/international forces; it has continued to conduct an insurgency following its removal.⁶⁶ Since 2001, the group has preserved some key principles including a strict interpretation of sharia law in areas under its control.⁶⁷

2.1 Structure and leadership

The Taliban position themselves as the shadow government of Afghanistan, and their commission and governing bodies replicate the administrative offices and duties of a typical government.⁶⁸ The Taliban have become an ‘organized political movement operating a parallel administration in large swaths of Afghanistan’⁶⁹ and has evolved to become a ‘local governance actor’ in the country by gaining and holding territory and thereby undertaking ‘some responsibility for the well-being of local communities’.⁷⁰ Regarding militant operations, it is a networked insurgency, with strong leadership at the top and decentralised local commanders who can mobilise resources at the district level.⁷¹

The Quetta Shura or Taliban Leadership Council [also known as *Rahbari Shura*⁷²] refers to the group of the 20 most senior leaders of the Taliban.⁷³ The main official political office of the Taliban is located in Qatar.⁷⁴ Much of the leadership is also located in Pakistan and connected through the Peshawar Shura Network.⁷⁵ The present supreme leader of the movement is Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, who is the head of the Leadership Council, Judiciary, and Executive Commissions and ‘other administrative organs’.⁷⁶ His deputy leaders are First Deputy Sirajuddin Jallaloudine Haqqani (leader of the Haqqani network) and two others: Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob [Mullah Mohammad Yaqub Omari]⁷⁷ and Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar Abdul Ahmad Turk.⁷⁸ Amid June 2020 reports that Akhundzada and Jallaloudine Haqqani, and other senior Taliban leaders had contracted COVID-19, and that some may have even died, it was reported by Foreign Policy magazine that Yaqoob was running Taliban and Haqqani operations. The Taliban denied these reports.⁷⁹

⁶⁶ BBC, Who are the Taliban, 27 February 2020, [url](#); See also: Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of Anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, AREU, January 2012, [url](#)

⁶⁷ RFE/RL, Taliban Constitution offers glimpse into militant group’s vision for Afghanistan, 27 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁸ New York Times (The), How the Taliban Outlasted a Superpower: Tenacity and Carnage, 26 May 2020, [url](#); UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 12

⁶⁹ USIP, Insurgent Bureaucracy: How the Taliban Makes Policy, Peaceworks No. 153, November 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁰ USIP, Service Delivery in Taliban-Influenced Areas of Afghanistan, Special Reports No. 465, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁷¹ New York Times (The), How the Taliban Outlasted a Superpower: Tenacity and Carnage, 26 May 2020, [url](#)

⁷² Taliban’s supreme consultative organ. It provides political, military and economic advice to the supreme leader of the movement *Amir-ul-Momeneen* or commander of the believers.

⁷³ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 6 (footnote 5), Annex B, p. 25

⁷⁴ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, para. 2

⁷⁵ New York Times (The), How the Taliban Outlasted a Superpower: Tenacity and Carnage, 26 May 2020, [url](#); UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, p. 26, p. 6

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

⁷⁷ Yaqub is the son of the Taliban’s founder, Mullah Omar. He is not popular in the movement and is reportedly seeking to shore up his position in advance of shuras upcoming this year. FP, Factional Struggles Emerge in Virus-Afflicted Taliban Top Ranks, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁸ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, para. A

⁷⁹ FP, Factional Struggles Emerge in Virus-Afflicted Taliban Top Ranks, 9 June 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Taliban Officials Deny Report That Top Leader Died From Coronavirus, 2 June 2020, [url](#)

The Government of Afghanistan provided a list in the UN's 27 May report of named and known members of the Taliban shadow administration and their respective areas of responsibility/commission.⁸⁰

The following commissions are identified by the UN⁸¹ and also described in a Taliban booklet published in 2020 and available on their website:⁸²

1. The Military Commission⁸³ [*Nizami Kamission*]: supervises appointed shadow governors and deputies for all 34 provinces, and group/field commanders and squad leaders at the district level.⁸⁴ The Military Commission is divided across regional areas to distribute fighters and organise missions and operations.⁸⁵ The UN reported in May that it was headed by Mullah Ibrahim Sadar⁸⁶, however other sources in May 2020 stated that Mohammad Yaqub had been appointed head.⁸⁷
2. The Political Commission [*Siasi Kamission*]: Based in Doha, Qatar, it leads the political affairs of the Taliban movement.⁸⁸
3. Intelligence Commission⁸⁹
4. Commission for Financial Affairs (including customs, mining, and properties)⁹⁰
5. Judicial Commission⁹¹: *Mahkama* or the court system, is composed of *Ebtedaya* (primary courts), *Morafea* (appeal courts) and *Tamiz* (supreme court). Courts are ruled under the Sharia law. Courts and judges are mobile and static in areas where insurgents maintain a significant presence.⁹²
6. Media Commission⁹³ [*Farhangi Kamission*]: also called the Cultural Commission runs cultural and media-related issues of the movement, including six websites in five languages, six online magazines (which are also distributed in printed formats in rural areas): *Srak* څرک (Trace), *Shahamat* شهادت (Courage), *Morchal* مورچل (Stronghold), *Haqiqat* حقيقت (Truth), *Al-Samood* الصمود (Resistance), and *Shariat* شريعت (Islamic law). *Farhangi Kamission* also publishes books, and *Layeha* (Codes of Conduct).⁹⁴

⁸⁰ The full list and detailed explanation of the structure of the Taliban is available in: UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex

⁸¹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

⁸² Voice of Jihad, پوښتنې او ځوابونه [‘Questions and answers’ Booklet], [url](#), 26 March 2020, p. 9 – 16. The Booklet titled ‘Questions and answers’ was published in March 2020 in the magazines and books sub-section of the Taliban’s website [url](#); The Pashto description of the cover states: Islamic Emirate and The Jihad Process, Questions and Answers. It is the first edition of the book, 1 000 copies have been published.

⁸³ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

⁸⁴ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 25

⁸⁵ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, p. 25

⁸⁶ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex

⁸⁷ Telegraph (The), Taliban’s founder’s son appointed military chief of insurgents, 7 May 2020, [url](#); BBC Monitoring/Afghan Islamic Press, 13 May 2020, Afghan Taliban founder’s son appointed as military chief, (Factiva)

⁸⁸ Voice of Jihad, پوښتنې او ځوابونه [‘Questions and answers’], [url](#), 26 March 2020, p. 12-13

⁸⁹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

⁹⁰ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

⁹¹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

⁹² Voice of Jihad, پوښتنې او ځوابونه [‘Questions and answers’], [url](#), 26 March 2020, p. 11

⁹³ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

⁹⁴ Voice of Jihad, پوښتنې او ځوابونه [‘Questions and answers’], [url](#), 26 March 2020, p. 13

7. Health Commission⁹⁵ [*Sehat Kamission*]: provides medical assistance to the injured Taliban fighters and its medical team organises their transportation to medical facilities.⁹⁶
8. Commission for Training, Learning and Higher Education [*Talim-aw-Tarbia Kamission*] or the Education Commission is in charge of providing Islamic teachings and establishes madrasas in areas under Taliban control.⁹⁷
9. Commission for Agriculture, Livestock, *Ushr* [religious taxes⁹⁸] and *Zakat* [obligatory payment for Muslims to give as alms to the poor or as tax collected by a Muslim state⁹⁹]¹⁰⁰
10. Recruitment, Outreach and Guidance Commission¹⁰¹ [*Da'wat, Irshad, Jalb-o-Jazb Kamission*] leads the recruitment of new members for the group. The commission preaches to attract and recruit from amongst ANSDF personnel.¹⁰² It conducts widespread preaching activities, manages madrasas (Koranic schools), and particularly recruits amongst the local population. The said commission publishes lists of ANSDF personnel who allegedly joined the Taliban movement.¹⁰³
11. Prisoner's Commission¹⁰⁴ [*De Bandiaan Kamission*] is in charge of monitoring the living conditions of prisoners/detainees across the country, including captured Taliban fighters by the Afghan Government.¹⁰⁵
12. Commission for NGOs¹⁰⁶ [*Mosesaat Kamission*] or the Organisations (NGOs) Commission is in charge of monitoring humanitarian NGOs in zones under the Taliban's control. The Taliban website states that the *Mosesaat Kamission* reportedly provides for a safe environment only for organisations and NGOs that are independent from the government and are not considered as pro-government or spying agencies.¹⁰⁷
13. Commission for the Prevention of Civilian Casualties and Complaints¹⁰⁸: The Taliban website lists this commission as falling under the Military Commission and dealing with civilian matters related to casualties.¹⁰⁹
14. Antiquities Commission¹¹⁰
15. Border Control Commission¹¹¹
16. Organ for Martyrs and Persons with Disabilities¹¹²

⁹⁵ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

⁹⁶ Voice of Jihad, پوښتني او ځوابونه ['Questions and answers'], [url](#), 26 March 2020, p. 15-16

⁹⁷ Voice of Jihad, پوښتني او ځوابونه ['Questions and answers'], [url](#), 26 March 2020, p. 14

⁹⁸ USIP, Service Delivery in Taliban-Influenced Areas of Afghanistan, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 18

⁹⁹ USIP, Service Delivery in Taliban-Influenced Areas of Afghanistan, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁰⁰ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

¹⁰¹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

¹⁰² Voice of Jihad, د دعوت ارشاد، جلب چذب کمیسیون ['Outreach, Guidance and recruitment commission'], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰³ Voice of Jihad, پوښتني او ځوابونه ['Questions and answers'], [url](#), 26 March 2020, p. 13-14

¹⁰⁴ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

¹⁰⁵ Voice of Jihad, پوښتني او ځوابونه ['Questions and answers'], [url](#), 26 March 2020, p. 16

¹⁰⁶ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

¹⁰⁷ Voice of Jihad, پوښتني او ځوابونه ['Questions and answers'], [url](#), 26 March 2020, p. 14-15

¹⁰⁸ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

¹⁰⁹ Voice of Jihad, د سماع شکایاتو او ملي تلفاتو د مخنيوي کمیسیون ['Complaints and preventing civilian casualties commission'], n.d., [url](#)

¹¹⁰ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

¹¹¹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

¹¹² UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, pp. 25-26

In February 2020, the Taliban announced on their website that they had introduced a new mixed Commission of Central Dar-ul-Fatwa (an institution competent in issuing Islamic verdicts): the Assembly of Islamic Jurisprudence and 'Specialists' (Islamic law jurists). The said commission was created in April 2019; it may serve as legislative body of the movement.¹¹³ Further information could not be found.

Leadership divisions

Throughout the US-Taliban negotiations, and despite reshuffling of its provincial appointments prior to the 2020 fighting season, the Taliban leadership has been able to maintain unity within the rank and file, though there are deepening divisions around cutting ties with Al Qaeda.¹¹⁴ For the most part, the leadership has been united in favour of pursuing the US talks, edging out dissidents who oppose the deal.¹¹⁵

One new splinter group of Senior Taliban dissidents has emerged, as of May 2020, known as Hizb-e Velayat Islami or Hezb-e Walayat-e Islami (Islamic Governorate Party or Islamic Guardianship Party).¹¹⁶ The group opposes the US deal and has links to Iran, marking possible leadership divisions.¹¹⁷ A leadership split on the implementation of the US-Taliban deal and power struggles within the organisation could impact the potential peace process.¹¹⁸

The Rasoul Shura, a minority breakaway group from the Taliban that split in 2015¹¹⁹ led by Mullah Mohammad Rasool, out of western Afghanistan, declared that they did not support the talks with the US.¹²⁰ Foreign Policy reported that they lost power in the face of this.¹²¹ Clashes between the main Taliban and Rasoul faction have caused deaths and assassinations between the groups as confrontations between the two have occurred. The possibility of divisions over the deal could pose a threat to the deal itself.¹²²

2.2 Strength, presence, territorial control, and capacity

The Taliban control large parts of Afghanistan.¹²³ Interlocutors reported in the UN Security Council's May 2020 report that 50-60 % of Afghan territory is contested between the Taliban and government, with 21 districts reportedly under full Taliban control, a decrease from 25-30 in 2019.¹²⁴ However, on its Voice of Jihad website citing its 2019 'annual report', the Taliban itself claimed to control 28¹²⁵

¹¹³ Voice of Jihad, *د مرکزي دارالافتاء، فقهي مجالسو او تخصصاتو کمیسیون ته لنډه کتنه*, [A brief look at the central institution of verdicts, council of jurisprudence and specialities (on Sharia) commission'], 17 February 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁴ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), paras. 18-20

¹¹⁵ FP, Factional Struggles Emerge in Virus-Afflicted Taliban Top Ranks, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 20; RFE/RL, Iranian Links: New Taliban Splinter Group Emerges That Opposes U.S. Deal, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ RFE/RL, Iranian Links: New Taliban Splinter Group Emerges That Opposes U.S. Deal, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ FP, Factional Struggles Emerge in Virus-Afflicted Taliban Top Ranks, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ Stars and Stripes, Airstrike in western Afghanistan kills leader of Taliban splinter group, may have killed civilians, 9 January 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁰ Asia Times, Factors affecting divisions among Afghan Taliban, 22 May 2020, [url](#)

¹²¹ FP, Factional Struggles Emerge in Virus-Afflicted Taliban Top Ranks, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

¹²² FP, Factional Struggles Emerge in Virus-Afflicted Taliban Top Ranks, 9 June 2020, [url](#); Asia Times, Factors affecting divisions among Afghan Taliban, 22 May 2020, [url](#)

¹²³ USIP, Insurgent Bureaucracy: How the Taliban Makes Policy, Peaceworks No. 153, November 2019, [url](#), p. 6; BBC, Who are the Taliban, 27 February 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁴ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 29

¹²⁵ Arghandab: Daychop an and Mizan; Badakhshan: Arghanj Khwa and Keran wa Manjan Districts; Badghis: Murghab District; Baghlan: Guzargahi Nur District; Balkh: Zari District; Farah: Anar Dara and Bala Buluk Districts; Faryab: Qurghan and Qarmaqol Districts; Ghazni: Giro District; Ghor: Charsada District; Jowzjan: Qush Tepa and Darzab Districts; Kandahar: Maruf District; Kunduz: Dasht-e-Aarchi, Khan Abaad and Qala Zaal Districts; Paktia: Khoshmand District; Samangan: Darah Sof District; Takhar: Khwaja Ghar, Cha Ab, Darqad and Bahar Districts; Uruzgan: Char-Chine District; Zabul: Naw Bahar Districts

district capitals.¹²⁶ However, in a May 2020 article citing their mapping Taliban control, LWJ stated that the Taliban controlled 75 districts (19 %) and contested 189 (47 %).¹²⁷

Estimates of the Taliban's active fighters range from 40 000 to 80 000¹²⁸ or 55 000 to 85 000 with additional 'facilitators and non-combatants' bringing this number as high as 100 000. This shows that the Taliban has no shortage of recruits, funds, or weapons.¹²⁹

According to the Security Council, reporting in May 2020,

'the Taliban remain internally disciplined enough to be a formidable fighting force, there are divisions within the group, which make compromise with its adversaries difficult, and its messaging remains hard-line. The group also appears well prepared for the 2020 fighting season and raising the tempo of its attacks on Afghan government targets while trying to avoid provoking the United States. Differences in interpretation of the agreement could lead to periodic crises in its implementation. Hard-line Taliban believe that they can and will still achieve their aims by force.'¹³⁰

2.3 Objectives

Sources reported that despite agreement with the US, the Taliban leadership and commanders informed the population that the Afghan government would be toppled.¹³¹ Bill Roggio of the LWJ also stated that as of June 2020, the Taliban continued posting propaganda on their website, putting forward a 'message of scorn and disdain' for the US and Afghan governments, despite the agreement. According to Roggio, the 'jihadist group has been very clear over the past two decades that the only acceptable form of government in Afghanistan is an "Islamic system" that is to be ruled by the Taliban's government', an announcement it made through a *fatwa* released just days after signing the agreement.¹³² According to sources, the *fatwa* states that the withdrawal of US forces will not end its armed *jihad* or insurgency, but that it will continue to fight for an Islamic government ruled by an emir.¹³³ The UN Security Council also remarked that the Taliban increased their attacks while simultaneously negotiating with the US.¹³⁴ The UN remarked that the group remained confident that they could retake power by force.¹³⁵ Despite the deal with the US, through continuous fighting seasons,

¹²⁶ Voice of Jihad, د تېر کال فتوحاتو ته څغلنده کتنه [‘A quick look at last year's victories’], 31 December 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁷ RFE/RL, The Taliban, The Government, and Islamic State: Who Controls What in Afghanistan, 31 May 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁸ New York Times (The), Fact-checking Trump's Statements on Increased Military Strikes in Afghanistan, 12 September 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 28; See also: New York Times (The), How the Taliban Outlasted a Superpower: Tenacity and Carnage, 26 May 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁰ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3

¹³¹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 8

¹³² Roggio, B., Taliban denounces 'deviant beliefs,' including 'satanic western and disbelieving ideologies', LWJ, 10 June 2020, [url](#); See also: Roggio, B., Taliban religious decree calls for its emir to rule 'Islamic government' in Afghanistan, LWJ, 8 March 2020, [url](#)

¹³³ Roggio, B., Taliban religious decree calls for its emir to rule 'Islamic government' in Afghanistan, LWJ, 8 March 2020, [url](#); VOA, Taliban Defends Its Chief As 'Legal' Ruler of Afghanistan, 7 March 2020, [url](#); See also: New York Times (The), How the Taliban Outlasted a Superpower: Tenacity and Carnage, 26 May 2020, [url](#); see also: UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), paras. 8-12

¹³⁴ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 14

¹³⁵ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 12

the Taliban's continued goal has been to capture and hold provincial capitals; though this is still difficult for the group due to the continued presence of international forces.¹³⁶

LWJ reported that in a propaganda video released in June 2020, the Taliban narrator stated that 'the Deviants are those who are trained in the poisonous deviant beliefs of atheism, communism, secularism, democracy, and other satanic western and disbelieving ideologies in order to mislead the Muslims with their deviant ideologies.'¹³⁷

2.4 Recruitment strategies

The Taliban typically recruit young males from rural communities who are unemployed, educated in madrasas and ethnically Pashtun, according to independent Afghanistan expert, Borhan Osman.¹³⁸ Recruitment usually occurs through the group's Military Commission and outreach in mosques, as well as through personal networks and families of fighters, many of whom are motivated by 'deep loathing for the Western institutions and values the Afghan government has taken up from its allies'. Rather than paying salaries, the Taliban cover expenses; while the movement has become entrenched in crime and narcotics as fighters keep the spoils of these activities.¹³⁹

2.4.1 Child recruitment

Taliban also recruit children. For instance, in 2019, UNAMA documented 58 cases in which boys (children) were recruited by the Taliban and used to plant IEDs, carry explosives, collect intelligence, conduct suicide attacks and engage in hostilities.¹⁴⁰ USDOS indicated that Taliban used children as suicide bombers, tricking them, manipulating them with money or false religious justifications or 'forcing them' to become suicide bombers. In southern provinces, the Taliban used children not only as suicide bombers but also as human shields, or to plant IEDs.¹⁴¹ In exchange, Taliban paid cash money to some families and provided protection to others who sent their children to Taliban's schools (madrasas) for military and religious brainwash. Most of the children who were exposed to such risks came from poor families or rural areas.¹⁴² BBC also reported on teenagers who were recruited into the Taliban via video propaganda and through madrasas to plant IEDs.¹⁴³

2.5 Human rights violations and abuses

The Taliban continued to be accused of targeted killings in 2020¹⁴⁴; they have been involved in the deliberate targeting of civilians in both indiscriminate and targeted attacks and against civilian objects.¹⁴⁵ The Taliban continued to operate parallel justice mechanisms leading to executions by shadow courts and punishments deemed by UNAMA to be cruel, inhumane, and degrading punishments¹⁴⁶, (for more information on Taliban's parallel justice system, see [EASO COI Report, Afghanistan Criminal law, customary justice and informal dispute resolution, July 2020](#)). The Director of Ghor's Women's affairs department and the AIHRC in Ghor complained in a news article about the

¹³⁶ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 29

¹³⁷ Roggio, B., Taliban denounces 'deviant beliefs,' including 'satanic western and disbelieving ideologies', LWJ, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸ Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, Peaceworks No. 162, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁹ New York Times (The), How the Taliban Outlasted a Superpower: Tenacity and Carnage, 26 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 24

¹⁴¹ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 - Afghanistan, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 16-17

¹⁴² USDOS, 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report: Afghanistan, 19 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴³ BBC, Afghanistan: The detention centre for teenage Taliban members, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ Arab News, Motorbikes banned in Kabul following spike in crime, targeted killings as virus lockdown continues, 15 April 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), How the Taliban Outlasted a Superpower: Tenacity and Carnage, 26 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁴⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 50

brutality of the Taliban's 'kangaroo courts' and violations of victims' rights.¹⁴⁷ The Taliban has also been reported to use torture against detainees, including ANSF personnel.¹⁴⁸

2.6 Targeted individuals

2.6.1 Members of the Afghan security forces and pro-government militias

Targeting and killing of ANSDF is mentioned in the Taliban's *Layeha* (code of conduct), which is available on their website. The *Layeha*, in its first chapter, provides Taliban with instructions to make ANSDF surrender/join the group. Article 10 of the said code delegates *Ta'ziri* (punishment) authority to the Imam, deputy Imam, provincial judge or in their absence to the provincial governor to order the execution of an allegedly guilty ANSDF detainee or any other employee/official of the Government arrested by the group.¹⁴⁹ On their website, the Taliban continued to use the term 'puppets' or *Goodagyan* (گوداگان in Pashto language), for ANSDF personnel. As of 31 December 2019, the Taliban published a report in which they mentioned the number of ANSDF and government officials that the group has targeted in 2019. The report included the exact dates and locations of the incidents, as well as the names of the alleged ANSDF personnel killed by the group.¹⁵⁰

In June 2020, a spokesperson for the interior ministry stated that 422 members of the Afghan security force were killed and wounded by the Taliban in a week. According to the figures cited by the Afghan official, 222 attacks were carried out by the Taliban during the second week of June 2020 in 29 provinces.¹⁵¹ Tolonews reported that 171 security forces personnel were killed, 250 others were wounded in the clashes.¹⁵² Examples of recent general attacks on Afghan government/pro-government forces include:

- On 8 June 2019, the Taliban attacked security outposts in Poshta Noor village in Dawlatyar district of Ghor, killing fifteen members of the public uprising forces and civilians, and wounding a tribal elder and two others.¹⁵³
- On 4 July 2019, one civilian was killed, and another was wounded when the Taliban attacked the office of the local pro-government militia in Dawlatyar District of Ghor Province.¹⁵⁴
- In May 2020, Taliban fighters detonated a car bomb targeting Afghan intelligence agency National Security (NDS) forces in Ghazni, at least seven people were killed and 40 wounded as a result of this attack.¹⁵⁵
- On 6 June 2020, Taliban roadside bombing killed 11 pro-government militiamen on their way through Badakshan to support ANSDF.¹⁵⁶
- On 11 June 2020, a district police chief was killed and 4 officers wounded in Taliban clashes in Paktika.¹⁵⁷
- On 14 June 2020, 7 police officers were killed at a checkpoint in Pasaband (Ghor) in an attack attributed to the Taliban by local officials.¹⁵⁸

¹⁴⁷ Salaam Times, Taliban brutally take centre stage with couple's execution in Ghor, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸ Salaam Times, Rescued Afghan soldiers speak of appalling torture, brutality in Taliban prison, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ Voice of Jihad, لايحه ['code of conduct'], n.d., [url](#); Referring to an English translation of the *Layeha* (2010 version) made by the Afghanistan Analysts Network, Clark, K., The Layha: Calling the Taliban to Account, AAN, 4 July 2011, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ Voice of Jihad, د ۲۰۱۹ مېلادي کال مهمو پېښو ته ځغلنده کتنه, 31 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ Tolonews, 171 Govt Forces Killed in a Week in Taliban Attacks: Officials, 14 June, 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban killed, wounded over 400 Afghan forces in one week: Gov't, 14 June, 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵² Tolonews, 171 Govt Forces Killed in a Week in Taliban Attacks: Officials, 14 June, 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³ Tolonews, Several killed in Taliban attack in Ghor: Officials, 8 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-4 July, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵ Reuters, Taliban blast near Afghan intelligence base kills seven, injures 40, 18 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Bomb Blamed on Taliban Kills 11 Pro-govt Afghan Militiamen, 6 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷ Xinhua, District police chief killed in Taliban attack in E. Afghanistan, 11 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ AFP, Attack blamed on Taliban kills seven Afghan policemen, 14 June 2020, [url](#)

- Also in June 2020, 9 separate attacks on security posts were launched in Ghazni, killing 15 insurgents. The source did not mention whether security force members were hurt in clashes.¹⁵⁹

Recent examples of targeted killings of security force members also include:

- On 27 September 2019, a pro-government militia member and his father were killed after the Taliban attacked their house in Laman village of Qala-e-Naw City in Badghis Province.¹⁶⁰
- On 11 October 2019, in Badakhshan Province, two nephews of a local police commander killed their uncle in the Abjin area of Wardoj District, they took the commander's weapon and joined the Taliban.¹⁶¹
- On 24 October 2019, the Taliban targeted and killed the Badghis chief police in Kabul while he was on holidays.¹⁶²
- On 7 May 2020, the Taliban targeted and killed the Khost police chief and two of his personnel in a roadside bomb.¹⁶³ The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack on their website.¹⁶⁴
- A senior provincial police officer on his way to work was shot dead in Kandahar by the Taliban in June 2020.¹⁶⁵
- 7 June 2020, 3 policemen were assassinated at a checkpoint by the Taliban in Gozra district, Kabul.¹⁶⁶

2.6.1.1 Women in the ANSF

On 30 April 2020, SIGAR reported that there were 5 270 female personnel within the ANDSF (including 433 civilians). There were 3 535 female personnel serving within the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and 1 735 within the Ministry of Defence (MoD).¹⁶⁷ In March 2020, Tolonews reported that the number of female police officers was 2 800.¹⁶⁸ In December 2019, United States Department of States (USDOD) indicated that the number of registered female ANP was 3 077 for 8 898 *Tashkil* (planned numbers).¹⁶⁹

In Afghanistan, the participation of women in the ANDSF remained a taboo in society.¹⁷⁰ In October 2019, a news article about female Afghan police reported that the Taliban 'often threatens female soldiers', quoting an Afghan National Army (ANA) female soldier who said the Taliban threaten women with torture and cutting their nose and ears if they continued to serve the Afghan government. She stated that the Taliban sent her death threats (via a letter) accusing her of working for foreigners and negatively influencing women in the society.¹⁷¹

Recent examples of targeting of female ANDSF personnel include:

- On 28 August 2019, two female police officers working in Arghandab District of Kandahar Province were shot and killed by armed men on a motorcycle in PD1 of Kandahar City.¹⁷² Xinhua News stated that the attack was carried out by suspected Taliban.¹⁷³

¹⁵⁹ Xinhua, 24 including 4 policemen killed in fresh clashes in Afghanistan, 11 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶² Ariana News, Badghis police chief assassinated in Kabul, 24 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶³ Reuters, Taliban militant kills regional police chief in a latest attack, 8 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ Voice of Jihad [English], Police chief along [with] his deputy, 4 more killed, 8 May 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Taliban militant kills regional police chief in a latest attack, 8 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ Xinhua, 24 including 4 policemen killed in fresh clashes in Afghanistan, 11 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ Bakhtar News, Policemen Martyred by Taliban Attack in Kabul, 7 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 82

¹⁶⁸ Tolonews, Female officer calls for increased women's presence in ANSF, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 75

¹⁷⁰ ZORA, Female Afghan soldiers face a battle on all fronts, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ ZORA, Female Afghan soldiers face a battle on all fronts, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August: 23 – 29, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷³ Xinhua, Two female officers killed in S. Afghanistan, 28 August 2019, [url](#)

2.6.1.2 Family members of ANSF personnel

In July 2019, the New York Times reported that the Taliban continued to target families of Afghan soldiers to seek revenge. According to the report, Taliban also burned several of their houses while they were away from home.¹⁷⁴

Recent attacks against the families of ANDSF include:

- On 3 May 2019, a Taliban fighter killed the wife and 13-year-old son of an ANA soldier in Ahmadkhel District. The perpetrator was the nephew of the victim, who had secretly joined the Taliban to take revenge.¹⁷⁵
- On 6 August 2019, in Badghis Province, the Taliban shot and killed a woman in the Laman village of Qala-e Naw, the provincial capital. According to the source, the woman was engaged/married to an Afghan soldier. The woman was killed in front of people in an improvised Taliban court.¹⁷⁶
- On 7 August 2019, a taxi driver whose brother was an Afghan special forces commander was killed by the Taliban in the Khwaja Pesta area of Khanabad District of Kunduz Province.¹⁷⁷
- On 19 September 2019, one security force member and two of his relatives were killed by the Taliban, and another person was kidnapped by the group after they stopped a territorial army vehicle in the Zarshi area of Pashton Kot District of Faryab Province.¹⁷⁸

2.6.2 Government officials and those perceived as supporting the government

2.6.2.1 Government officials

Although Taliban officials claim that Taliban forces are ordered to protect civilians, civilian government employees are excluded from this category, which is a 'violation of the laws of war'.¹⁷⁹

Recent attacks on government officials include:

- On 25 June 2019, the Taliban killed two engineers of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in an ambush in the Porak area of Pol-e Alam City of Logar Province. According to the source, 'the engineers were working on the construction of a school in the provincial capital.'¹⁸⁰
- On 18 August 2019, the Taliban detained and later killed a village elder, who was working for the government, in the Chehldokhtaran village of Koshk-e Robatsangi District in Herat Province.¹⁸¹
- On 20 August 2019, in Baghlan Province, the Taliban kidnapped and killed the deputy of the Population Registration Department while he was travelling to Baghlan-e Markazi District from Pul-i-Khumri.¹⁸² In the same Province, on 25 August 2019, the Taliban abducted and later killed a provincial council member of Samangan Province in the Cheshma-e Sher area on the road between Balkh and Kabul.¹⁸³
- On 27 August 2019, the Taliban shot and killed a government official, who was on his way home from work, in Ahmad Abad District of Paktia Province.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁴ New York Times (The), Seeking revenge, Taliban target Afghan soldiers' families, 10 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ New York Times (The), Seeking revenge, Taliban target Afghan soldiers' families, 10 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#); Ariana News, Taliban insurgents shoot woman in Badghis, 6 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹ HRW, Taliban Linked to Murder of Afghan Rights Defender, 6 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 16-22, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 16-22, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

- On 22 September 2019, Taliban killed a teacher in the village of Barengi in Dulina District in Ghor Province and threatened to kill other teachers and government officials if they do not leave their jobs.¹⁸⁵
- On 8 October 2019, an election commission official was killed by the Taliban in the village of Bashi of Samangan Province. According to the source, the Taliban kidnapped the victim while he was travelling from Sancharak District to Sar-e Pul City and the day after he was killed.¹⁸⁶
- On 7 November 2019, the Taliban killed four judges in an ambush when they were travelling from Paktia to Kabul, in Mohammad Agha District of Logar Province.¹⁸⁷ Another source reported that three judges were killed in the incident.¹⁸⁸
- On 2 December 2019, the brother and the son of the governor of Sayyad District of Samangan Province were killed, and two police officers were wounded when Taliban fighters attacked the governor's house.¹⁸⁹
- In February 2020, Taliban militants were believed to be responsible for shooting to death Abdul Rahim, a primary court judge in Herat's Injil district, in a recent trend of targeted killings of judges by the group.¹⁹⁰ Abdul Rahim, the only court judge in Injil District, was shot and killed by unknown gunmen on motorcycles while he was returning home from prayer.¹⁹¹
- Five employees of a state-owned bank were abducted and shot by Taliban militants in Herat on 10 April 2020.¹⁹²
- In June 2020, a former Senator, Wali Ahamadzai, was abducted and killed by the Taliban in Logar.¹⁹³
- Unknown gunmen opened fire on a car belonging to the Attorney General's Office in June 2020, killing five people, including two state prosecutors. The Taliban denied involvement.¹⁹⁴

2.6.2.2 People seen to be supporting the government or spying

Article 17 [informal translation] of Taliban's *Layeha* (code of conduct) targets an alleged spy (*Jasoos* جاسوس in Pashto language). The provisions of the mentioned article delegates *Ta'ziri* (punishment) power to the Imam, deputy Imam, provincial judge or in their absence to the provincial governor to order the execution of an alleged spy. Article 18 of the *Layeha* code provides criteria based on which an individual can be considered as a spy: (1) based on self-confession without the usage of force, (2) based on the declaration of two witnesses, who shall convince the judge, (3) based on material proofs.¹⁹⁵

Some examples of targeted people include:

- In March 2019, a pregnant woman in Sancharak District in Sar-e Pol province was sentenced to death by the Taliban and instantly killed along with her unborn child for reportedly criticising the Taliban by calling their war against the government 'illegitimate'.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁵ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ Tolonews, Four judges killed in an ambush in Logar: Police, 7 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ Reuters, Three judges killed at the Taliban checkpoint in Afghanistan, official say, 7 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 30 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ Kazemi, R., Herat City's Reported Spike in Insecurity: What a sober reading of events reveals, 21 April 2020, [url](#); Xinhua, Militants kill judge in E. Afghanistan, 18 February 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 27 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹¹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 27 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹² RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Kills Five Bank Employees in Western Afghan Province, 10 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹³ Ariana News, Taliban kill former Afghan senator in Logar: local officials, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ AP, Gunmen kill 5, including 2 prosecutors, in Afghan capital, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ Voice of Jihad, لايحه ['code of conduct'], n.d., [url](#); Referring to an English translation of the Layeha (2010 version) made by the Afghanistan Analysts Network: Clark, K., The Layha: Calling the Taleban to Account, AAN, 4 July 2011, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶ Salaam Times, Taliban murder pregnant woman, unborn child in Sar-e-Pul, 25 March 2019, [url](#); USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2019 – Afghanistan, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 10-11

- In June 2020, unidentified gunmen reportedly killed a tribal elder and his wife and children in Maidan Wardak; they reportedly previously killed another son for cooperating with local Afghan police.¹⁹⁷
- On 4 August 2019, the Taliban reportedly killed a civilian in the village of Ghaib in Shuhada District of Badakhshan Province, accusing him of spying for the government.¹⁹⁸
- In Ghor Province, on 17 September 2019, the Taliban killed three civilian brothers, one the village manager, one a teacher, and the third a student. The victims were accused by the Taliban of having links with the government.¹⁹⁹
- In September 2019, the head of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) in Ghor province was abducted, shot and killed by the Taliban.²⁰⁰ In June 2020, two AIHRC staff were assassinated in Kabul through a bomb attack.²⁰¹
- On 11 November 2019, Taliban killed two civilians accused of supporting the government. The victims were kidnapped earlier by the group in Firozkoh District of Ghor Province.²⁰²
- On 29 January 2020, in the Sarjangel village of Morghab District, in Ghor province, a civilian who was returning home from prayer was shot dead by the Taliban claiming the man was a government spy.²⁰³ In a similar incident, in March 2020, a man accused by Taliban of spying for the government was shot dead by the group in the village of Qarchaghay in Qadis District, in Badghis province.²⁰⁴
- In January 2020, Afghan officials accused the Taliban of executing at least six members of the same family, including an infant girl, in a remote village in Faryab province, reportedly for prostitution.²⁰⁵ According to Afghan officials, the Taliban sentenced the family to death for 'immoral acts', accusing them of working in prostitution. However, according to Andkhoy district chief, locals claimed that the real reason behind this execution was the fact that a family member was a former Taliban militant who recently took part to the peace process.²⁰⁶

2.6.2.3 People working for foreign military forces or perceived as supporting them, including interpreters

In August 2018, a Taliban statement published on their Voice of Jihad website in Pashto/Dari indicated that the killing of foreign troops in Afghanistan remained a top priority for the group. The group considered commandos of the Defence Ministry, NDS Special Forces and Khost Protection Forces, as well as interpreters, contractors and spies as the closest supporters of foreign troops and considered them responsible for the killing of the Afghan population during night raids. The statement called on Taliban fighters to include the mentioned profiles in their priority targets and kill them.²⁰⁷

Article 11 of Taliban's *Layeha* orders the execution of individuals working for *Kofaar* (foreign infidels) including *Tarjoman* (interpreters) and delegates the authority to Taliban provincial shadow judges or in their absence to Taliban's provincial governor to practice such punishments.²⁰⁸ In August 2018, Taliban issued a statement calling upon its fighters to identify specific profiles such as interpreters and

¹⁹⁷ BBC Monitoring, Tribal elder, family shot dead in Central Afghan province, 12 June 2020 (Factiva)

¹⁹⁸ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 34; HRW, Taliban Linked to Murder of Afghan Rights Defender, 6 September 2019, [url](#); AIHRC, On the martyr of the Acting Head of Ghor Provincial Office of the AIHRC, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁰¹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Human Rights Body Staff Killed in Kabul Bomb Attack, 27 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁰³ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020 (updated 30 January 2020), [url](#)

²⁰⁴ New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), [url](#)

²⁰⁵ Reporterly, Six Family Members Shot Killed by Taliban in Faryab, 19 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ AP, Afghan officials say Taliban kill 6 members of same family, 19 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁷ Voice of Jihad, د دښمن وحشي ځواکونه بايد وپېژنو او هدف يې وگرځوو [‘Enemy’s savage troops must be identified and targeted’], 9 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁸ Voice of Jihad, لايحه [informal translation: ‘code of conduct’], n.d., [url](#); Referring to an English translation of the Layeha (2010 version) made by the Afghanistan Analysts Network: Clark, K., The Layha: Calling the Taleban to Account, AAN, 4 July 2011, [url](#)

kill them. The statement defined interpreters as criminals who actively participate in night raids alongside American troops killing Afghan population. The statement further states that interpreters shall be excluded from the Afghan society as they are infidels and savages.²⁰⁹

The 2020 Doha agreement between the US and the Taliban has created fears among Afghan interpreters working for the US.²¹⁰

Some recent incidents of targeted attacks against interpreters include:

- In April 2018, Taliban claimed on their website that during the night an ‘invader’s’ interpreter, Abdul Karim, was killed in an ambush in front of Maiwand Bank in Sarafa Market area of Police District 1 of Kandahar City.²¹¹
- On 29 September 2019, a young man was killed, and his elderly father was wounded in a Taliban attack. The victims were accused of cooperating with NATO forces and were kidnapped in Barra Khanah village of Firozkoh of Ghor Province.²¹²
- In March 2020, an Afghan interpreter who served the New Zealand forces in Bamyan Province as a volunteer interpreter stated that he and his family felt they were targets of the Taliban.²¹³

2.6.2.4 Religious leaders

In February 2020, Salaam Times, a newspaper funded by the US military, reported that over 100 religious scholars declared their support to the ANDSF in Herat Province where they visited the ANA 207th Zafar Corps in Guzara District.²¹⁴ The New York Times reported that for years the Taliban continued to target individuals with religious influence who would question the legitimacy of the group.²¹⁵

In 2019, UNAMA documented several incidents of attacks on places of worship, religious leaders, and worshippers, both by the ISKP and Taliban.²¹⁶ They also documented 17 civilian casualties (10 killed) from the targeted shootings of religious leaders and worshippers.²¹⁷ Interior ministry spokesperson, Tareq Arian, stated during a press conference in June 2020 that Taliban groups have targeted religious scholars in 2020, in an attempt to put ‘psychological pressure on the Afghan government’.²¹⁸

Some recent incidents of targeted attacks against religious scholars include:

- On 24 May 2019, Samiullah Rayhan, a popular religious scholar, was killed in an explosion that targeted Al-Taqwa mosque in Kabul. He was preaching in support of ANDSF.²¹⁹ The Taliban was blamed for the remote IED blown up where a crowd of 700 people gathered to hear Friday prayers of the well-known religious leader and critic of AGEs in Afghanistan. The explosion killed him and two others and injured 34 civilians.²²⁰
- On 11 September 2019, Mullah Mohammad Agha, a religious scholar who owned a madrasa in the Bakhto-Tangi village of Shawalikot District in Kandahar Province, was killed by the Taliban.²²¹

²⁰⁹ Voice of Jihad, *د دښمن وحشي ځواکونه بايد وپېژنو او هدف يې وگرځوو* [informal translation: ‘Enemy’s savage troops must be identified and targeted’], 9 August 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁰ NPR, *Afghan Interpreters Worry A US Withdrawal Will Leave Them Behind*, 2 March 2020, [url](#); AP, *As violence soars, time running out for Afghan interpreters*, 9 January 2020, (Factiva)

²¹¹ Voice of Jihad, *6 killed and wounded in Kandahar bombings*, 4 April 2018, [url](#)

²¹² New York Times (The), *Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019*, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²¹³ Stuff, *Second Afghan interpreter left “to die” in Afghanistan*, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴ Salaam Times, *Herat religious scholars stand behind Afghan forces amid partial truce*, 25 February 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁵ New York Times (The), *Bombing at mosque kills popular religious scholar*, 24 May 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁶ UNAMA, *Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 46-47

²¹⁷ UNAMA, *Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 47

²¹⁸ Al Jazeera, *Taliban killed, wounded over 400 Afghan forces in one week: Gov’t*, 14 June, 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁹ New York Times (The), *Bombing at mosque kills popular religious scholar*, 24 May 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, *Well-known religious scholar killed in Kabul explosion*, 24 May 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, *Protection of civilians in armed conflict*, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 47

²²⁰ UNAMA, *Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 47

²²¹ New York Times (The), *Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019*, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

- On 21 October 2019, an Imam of a mosque in the village of Naw Abad in Adraskan District of Herat Province was kidnapped and later killed by the Taliban.²²²
- On 5 March 2020, religious scholar Maulvi Noor Pacha Hammad was killed in PD5 of Kabul City.²²³

²²² New York Times (The), Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²²³ Pajhwok, Religious scholar shot dead in Kabul, 21 March 2020, [url](#)

3. Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)

The ISKP is a UN-designated terrorist organisation in Afghanistan²²⁴ with operational ties with local groups.²²⁵ It is a Salafi-Jihadist organisation that believes it is reviving a pure form of Islam maintaining that this can only be achieved by an armed jihad that will replace existing governments with a transnational Islamic caliphate, and which permits as legitimate in its aims mass-casualty attacks against non-combatants.²²⁶ According to an assessment by US officials as of November 2019, ISKP had between 4 000 to 5 000 fighters, most of whom withdrew to Kunar and the north following US operations during that month aimed at pushing them out of their usual territory in Nangarhar.²²⁷ According to reporting on their website, the Taliban have conducted successful operations against ISKP, claiming, for instance, to have defeated Daesh in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces.²²⁸

3.1 Structure and leadership

In April 2019, Islamic State's core leadership in Iraq and Syria (known as IS, ISIL, ISIS) directly replaced ISKP's leader with Mawlawi Aslam Farooqi (formerly running IS/ISKP's Pakistan operations), which 'underscored' ISKP's relations with ISIL core.²²⁹ In 2019, it continued to lose its traditional territory and experienced high attrition of senior leaders.²³⁰ Marking further blows to the group, numerous senior leaders, including Aslam Farooqi, were captured by Afghan forces in 2019²³¹ and in 2020.²³² Senior leaders have also gone further into the mountains, gone into hiding, fled to northern Kunar, or crossed into Pakistan.²³³ As of May 2020 reporting, ISKP in Kunar is directed by the ISKP-Deputy leader, Sheikh Matiullah Kamahwal, though it is unclear who is now the leader of ISKP nationally following Farooqi's capture.²³⁴

A 2019 study published in the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) Sentinel used open source reports on ISKP militants killed or captured by coalition forces to code a database and build a picture of ISKP leadership. This 'coding' of the leadership revealed the following structure: The heads of ISKP's leadership are *emirs* (Arabic word used for a commander). On the second level in the hierarchy are spokesmen, provincial level commanders/deputy commanders, chiefs/deputy chiefs of ISKP wings

²²⁴ UN Security Council, Letter to the Chair of the Security Council Committee - concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, S/2020/53, 20 January 2020, [url](#)

²²⁵ Jadoon, A. and Mines, A., Taking aim: Islamic State Khorasan's leadership losses, CTC Sentinel, 10 September 2019, [url](#), pp. 1 and 16 ; Al Jazeera, Weakened ISIL's sectarian agenda exacts heavy toll in Afghanistan, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

²²⁶ Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, Peaceworks No. 162, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²²⁷ Al Jazeera reported in December 2019 that about half of the group's 4 000 fighters were still active in Afghanistan.

²²⁸ Voice of Jihad, Daesh crawls back into the hole it came from!!, 21 November 2019, [url](#); Voice of Jihad, Daesh militias face major defeat in Kunar as entire province rescued from its evil, 14 March 2020 [url](#)

²²⁹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 59-60

²³⁰ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 59-60

²³¹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 67; Khaama Press, ISIS Khurasan leader and many other top ISIS commanders arrested in Afghanistan, 4 April 2020, [url](#); Jadoon, A. and Mines, A., Taking aim: Islamic State Khorasan's leadership losses, CTC Sentinel, 10 September 2019, [url](#), pp. 1 and 16 ;

²³² Tolonews, "Key" Daesh leaders arrested in Kabul: NDS, 11 May 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok, Afghan forces arrest ISIS leader for South and Far East Asia, 2 senior ISIS leaders, 11 May 2020, [url](#); BBC, IS regional leader Sheikh Khorasani "arrested in Afghanistan", 11 May 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Radio Free Afghanistan, Afghan Forces Capture Key Figures from Islamic State's South Asia Branch, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

²³³ Stars and Stripes, ISIS in Afghanistan was 'obliterated' but fighters who escaped could stage resurgence, 10 February 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Weakened ISIL's sectarian agenda exacts heavy toll in Afghanistan, 2 April 2020, [url](#); Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²³⁴ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 71

(responsible for military, intelligence or logistics) and *Shura* council members. Third in the hierarchy are district level commanders/chief commanders, or other ‘critical leaders’ including those described as ‘prominent’ or ‘notorious’. Fourth in the hierarchy are local leaders including ISKP members operating on sub-district levels, for instance as recruiters, financiers, explosives experts, judges, etc.²³⁵

3.2 Strength, presence, territorial control, capacity

Between September and November 2019, ISKP faced an ‘existential threat’ as it was forced out of its traditional territory in Nangarhar through campaigns by Afghan and US forces, as well as from attacks against it by the Taliban as they sought to retake smuggling routes lost to ISKP in previous years.²³⁶ Local resentment was also a factor as residents set up Local Uprising Forces which also contributed to pressure on the group.²³⁷ ISKP used to have a presence spread over seven districts in Nangarhar, however the May 2020 UN Security Council report states that ‘interlocutors of the Monitoring Team maintained that ISIL-K has no permanent organized presence in the north of Afghanistan, although the Team has received reports of small groups of foreign fighters believed to be members of ISIL-K operating in Taliban-controlled areas of the north.’²³⁸

During the aforementioned period (Sept-Nov 2019), its 22-man leadership council and 1 750 fighters were reduced to less than 200 fighters. By the end of February, over 1 400 fighters and their families surrendered after the collapse of Nangarhar.²³⁹ Much of the ISKP’s fighting force reportedly fled the province while others surrendered with their families.²⁴⁰ Prior to its retreat from Nangarhar, ISKP was seen as the ‘most resilient and successful affiliate’ of ISIL outside its core; however by spring 2020, key security officials described the ‘complete reversal’ of the situation in Nangarhar, and a ‘turning point’ in dismantling ISKP.²⁴¹

Estimates on ISKP’s numbers vary. The US military estimated, ‘with low confidence, that ISIS-K “lost up to half its force” ... possibly decreasing to fewer than 1 000 fighters in Afghanistan this quarter”’ due to ISKP surrenders and to the strikes by the coalition and Afghan forces and Taliban ground operations against the group.²⁴² However, the May 2020 UN Security Council report stated that varying numbers were given but the UN sanctions Monitoring Team assessed their strength at approximately 2 200 armed fighters, mostly in Kunar (Tsowkey district), following the later campaigns against them.²⁴³

Sources report on ISKP cells being present ‘throughout Afghanistan’²⁴⁴, including in: Kunar, Herat and Kabul City²⁴⁵, and their presence was also locally reported in Nuristan (2019).²⁴⁶ Smaller groups of

²³⁵ Jadoon, A. and Mines, A., Taking aim: Islamic State Khorasan’s leadership losses, CTC Sentinel, 10 September 2019, [url](#), pp. 1 and 16

²³⁶ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 60

²³⁷ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²³⁸ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 72

²³⁹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 62-63

²⁴⁰ OFS, Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 1 October – 31 December 2019, 5 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 13

²⁴¹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 65

²⁴² OFS, Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 1 October – 31 December 2019, 5 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 5, 13

²⁴³ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 69

²⁴⁴ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 72

²⁴⁵ RFE/RL and LWJ, The Taliban, The Government, And Islamic State: Who Controls What In Afghanistan, 31 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁶ Ariana News Agency, افزایش نگرانی ها از عسکرگیری داعشیان در نورستان, [Rising concerns on the recruitment of fighters by Daesh in Nooristan], 24 August 2019, [url](#); OFS, Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 1 October – 31 December 2019, 5 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 5, 13

supporters were said to be in locations such as Helmand²⁴⁷, Kapisa, Baghlan²⁴⁸, and Faryab.²⁴⁹ In March 2020, AAN reported that some small groups of 15-20 ISKP fighters were still operating in remote districts of Nangarhar (Deh Bala, Pachir wa Agam, Khogyani) in villages with a dominant ISKP mindset.²⁵⁰

Other reporting on ISKP presence relates to reported clearance and arrest operations. On 14 March 2020, the Taliban claimed that their *Mujahidin* (fighters) cleared several villages in Mungai District of Kunar Province.²⁵¹ Afghan forces have also conducted anti-ISKP operations and claimed to have made ‘hundreds’ of arrests in Jalalabad and Kabul, as of May 2020.²⁵² Following the ISKP defeats in Helmand and Nangarhar Provinces, local media also quoted the Badakhshan Governor in April 2020 saying that the group tied its links with Al-Qaeda (composed of foreign fighters) to build a new ‘caliphate’ based in Dara-e-Khustak, Jurm District of Badakhshan Province. Local officials claimed in local media that there were 600 Daesh and Al-Qaeda families (some from Asian countries) settled in Dara-e Khustak. In addition to Jurm District, in Warduj and Raghistan Districts of Badakhshan Province, other insurgent groups including Ansarullah network, the eastern Turkestan group, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan are ‘working directly’ with ISKP and Al-Qaeda.²⁵³

According to AAN analyst Ali Obaid, as of March 2020, the government controlled most of the low-lying areas of Nangarhar, while the Taliban expanded their controls over the remote areas where ISKP had remaining bases.²⁵⁴ Regarding the ISKP:

‘it remains capable of mounting attacks in various parts of the country, including Kabul, but some of those claimed may have arisen wholly or partly from a tactical accommodation with the Haqqani Network. The main risk of ISIL-K resurgence in the context of the Afghan peace process may lie in its ability to present itself as the only defiant terror group in the country and attract new recruits and funding accordingly.’²⁵⁵

The UN remarked that, according to its information, ‘debate continues’ about the extent to which ISKP can carry out high profile attacks, especially complex operations in Kabul, noting that there is alleged involvement and assistance from the Haqqani Network. Attacks ISKP claims for itself may have been carried out by Haqqani Network. ISKP’s strategic capability is described as limited in Afghanistan.²⁵⁶ The UN stated that ISKP has carried out four attacks in Kabul in 2020, compared to four such attacks during all of 2019, with no clear reason for the increase.²⁵⁷ Senior Afghan security officials have reportedly drawn the conclusion about ISKP’s operations that ‘all the attacks claimed by ISKP depended on the same supply and logistics chain used for supplying attacks by the Taliban’ including the Haqqani network, outsourced to a ‘single criminal-terrorist network’ with a monopoly likely supported by corrupt officials. Afghan officials also refuted several ISKP-claimed attacks attributing them to Taliban or Haqqani actors.²⁵⁸

²⁴⁷ SWN, Daesh regrouping and recruiting in Helmand, 25 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁸ OFS, Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 1 October – 31 December 2019, 5 February 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²⁴⁹ UN Security Council, Letter to the Chair of the Security Council Committee - concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, 20 January 2020, [url](#), para. 53

²⁵⁰ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁵¹ Voice of Jihad, Daesh militants face major defeat in Kunar as entire province rescued from its evil, 14 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁵² UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 72

²⁵³ Ariana News, Daesh, Al-Qaeda to establish Caliphate in Badakhshan, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁴ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁵ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²⁵⁶ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 73, 76

²⁵⁷ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 75

²⁵⁸ Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, Peaceworks No. 162, 1 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 9-10

In the UN Security Council report of May 2020, Afghan officials ‘cautioned’ that ISKP ‘still retained cells throughout Afghanistan for the purpose of carrying out high profile attacks’.²⁵⁹

On 6 May 2020, NDS carried out three attacks against ISKP hideouts in Kabul (two in PD11) and one in Shakar Dara District (outside of Kabul City), in which eight insurgents were arrested (including two children) and five killed (including three women). The group was composed of members of ISKP and Haqqani Network led by those involved in several attacks including the attack on a Sikh temple in Kabul.²⁶⁰ AAN reported also that some Afghan officials pointed to Haqqani Network and Indian officials have said the Pakistani Lashkar-e Taiba were the perpetrators.²⁶¹

3.3 Objectives

ISKP’s ideology calls for the establishment of a global ‘caliphate’ attained through global warfare that ‘would kill or enslave all those who do not adhere to an extremist interpretation of Islam’.²⁶² According to Borhan Osman, ISKP has as a stated aim to declare jihad against ‘any tribe or political group that defied its rules’ and to restore a ‘pristine’ Islam, targeting those it deems to be to blame for corrupting Islam, which includes *Shias* and *Sufis*, for example.²⁶³

According to UN reporting, attacks ‘most likely carried out by [ISKP] are those against soft targets’ such as Shia Hazara communities.²⁶⁴ The AAN²⁶⁵ and Crisis Group report similarly. The International Crisis Group’s senior analyst on Afghanistan, stated in Al Jazeera that ISKP continued to primarily target non-Sunni religious minorities in the capital Kabul, in particular non-Sunni Muslims such as Shia Hazara Muslims, that the group consider ‘infidels’, with the aim to ‘foment sectarian divide, which is in line with the groups’ continued objectives in Afghanistan.²⁶⁶ Sikhs as well as Hindus have been targeted in 2018.²⁶⁷

In light of the Taliban’s entry into talks with the US, ISKP continued to preach their mission as a ‘purer form of *jihad*’ in contrast with the Taliban’s opening up to US talks.²⁶⁸ According to the UN by doing this, ISKP is ‘setting up a narrative that places ISIL as the only defiant terror group’ in an effort to gain recruits dissenting from the Taliban and Al Qaeda, especially those who oppose any agreement talks with the US or Afghan governments.²⁶⁹

According to the UN Security Council report, ISKP ‘is willing to claim responsibility’ for attacks that kill civilians, as this demonstrates their ‘capability and relevance’; while the Taliban is given the ability to deny civilian casualties when attacks are carried out under the ‘tactical autonomy of the Haqqani network’.²⁷⁰ According to Borhan Osman, expert on Afghanistan and formerly part of the Afghanistan

²⁵⁹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 72

²⁶⁰ Tolonews, Afghan forces raid Daesh hideout north of Kabul, 6 May 2019, [url](#); 1TV, Joint Daesh-Haqqani cell eliminated in Kabul: NDS, 6 May 2020, [url](#); Ariana News, At least 13 Daesh fighters killed, detained in Kabul, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁶¹ Foschini, F., Blood in the Abode of Peace, 1 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁶² Stars and Stripes, ISIS in Afghanistan was ‘obliterated’ but fighters who escaped could stage resurgence, 10 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁶³ Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, Peaceworks No. 162, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 16

²⁶⁴ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 62-63

²⁶⁵ Foschini, F., Blood in the Abode of Peace: The attacks on Kabul’s Sikhs, 1 April 2020, [url](#); Osman, B., With an Active Cell in Kabul, ISKP Tries to Bring sectarianism to the Afghan War, 19 October 2016, [url](#)

²⁶⁶ Al Jazeera, Weakened ISIL’s sectarian agenda exacts heavy toll in Afghanistan, 2 April 2020, [url](#);

²⁶⁷ VOA, Save Afghan Sikhs And Hindus From Genocide, Activists Urge, 19 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁸ Stars and Stripes, ISIS in Afghanistan was ‘obliterated’ but fighters who escaped could stage resurgence, 10 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 77

²⁷⁰ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 73

Analysts Network, in the absence of post-Doha urban attacks by the Taliban, ISKP's recent attacks and targeting pattern, especially in Kabul, indicate that ISKP saw the opportunity to demonstrate its visibility by carrying out high profile attacks in 2020 to highlight its jihadi cause in contrast to the Taliban's 'betrayal' for negotiating with the US.²⁷¹

3.4 Recruitment strategies

ISKP continued to recruit new members through a range of means, including:

- through ideological appeal or those seeking revenge²⁷², the internet, and through propaganda in madrasas and within universities in Afghanistan;²⁷³
- recruiting teenagers and youth;²⁷⁴
- through coercion and through the threat of violence, while others joined voluntarily seeking wages and high salaries that never materialised.²⁷⁵

In an analysis of ISKP recruitment published in June 2020 by independent expert Borhan Osman, he notes that ISKP tends to recruit in urban centres, both men and women, from middle-class backgrounds who are non-Pashtun university students.²⁷⁶ They are chiefly drawn to join ISKP by 'frustrations with the status quo', by 'the purity of ISKP ideology', by egalitarianism, Salafist marriage, and by the possibility to live in the 'caliphate'; fundamentally he says, they are driven by the breakdown of traditional Afghan society. Borhan Osman further noted that ISKP is not a foreign phenomenon, and that the group recruits locally.²⁷⁷

ISKP ideology was also reported by interlocutors for the UN's May report to have been 'viewed sympathetically by some in the north, particularly among certain local ethnic Tajik and Uzbek populations'.²⁷⁸ From interviews with more than 60 ISKP recruits, Borhan Osman also found that they were predominantly from ethnically Tajik areas, such as from Parwan (mostly from Ghorband district), Panjsher, and Kapisa (Najrab and Tagab districts).²⁷⁹

Recent ISKP propaganda and counter-Taliban narratives on the 2020 negotiations are aimed at recruiting dissenters from AQ and the Taliban who oppose 'any agreement' with the US and Afghan governments.²⁸⁰

²⁷¹ Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, Peaceworks No. 162, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 10

²⁷² Al Jazeera, *Weakened ISIL's sectarian agenda exacts heavy toll in Afghanistan*, 2 April 2020, [url](#); Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, Peaceworks No. 162, 1 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 15-16

²⁷³ UN Security Council, *Letter to the Chair of the Security Council Committee - concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities*, S/2020/53, 20 January 2020, [url](#), p. 16; UNSC, *Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban*, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 76; BBC, *Afghanistan: The detention centre for teenage Taliban members*, 21 April 2020, [url](#); Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, Peaceworks No. 162, 1 June 2020, [url](#); FP, *In Afghanistan, the Islamic State Threatens Long-Term Peace*, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁴ BBC, *Afghanistan: The detention centre for teenage Taliban members*, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁵ UNSC, *Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban*, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 64

²⁷⁶ Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, Peaceworks No. 162, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷⁷ Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, Peaceworks No. 162, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷⁸ UNSC, *Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban*, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 66

²⁷⁹ Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, Peaceworks No. 162, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

²⁸⁰ UNSC, *Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban*, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 77

3.5 Human rights violations and abuses

According to AAN, local resentment against ISKP grew in 2015 when it began to ‘behave more brutally’ toward the local population, including carrying out beheadings on accusations of spying for the government or Taliban.²⁸¹ In April 2020, Human Rights Watch called on the Afghan government to prosecute captured ISKP leader Aslam Farooqi for war crimes due to his alleged role in organising recent deliberate attacks against civilians since becoming leader in 2019.²⁸² From 2016 to 2018, insurgent groups have ‘sharply escalated’ their attacks in Kabul and urban areas, killing and injuring thousands of civilians, including a number of suicide attacks by ISKP.²⁸³ UNAMA has indicated that ISKP’s attacks on Shia minorities during 2019 are serious violations of international law, potentially amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity.²⁸⁴

3.6 Targeted individuals and recent attacks

3.6.1 Hazara Shia

ISKP continues to make sectarian attacks mainly against Shia minorities, who are mostly Hazara, noting 7 of 10 such attacks were by ISKP in 2019, which led to 112 dead and 361 injured civilians.²⁸⁵ ISKP has claimed recent attacks on Shia Hazara, including the following:

- An explosive device targeting a mainly Hazara area in Herat City on 5 August 2019;²⁸⁶
- A suicide attack on a wedding in Kabul on 17 August 2019²⁸⁷ that killed 63 and wounded more than 180 people in a mainly Shia area;²⁸⁸
- A double suicide attack on a memorial ceremony for a prominent Hazara leader on 6 March 2020.²⁸⁹ Armed men also opened fire on the crowd of about 1 000 people gathered in Mazari Square area of Kabul, along with numerous high profile attendees, including former President Karzai.²⁹⁰ Pajhwok reported that the attack killed at least 32 and injured more than 80 people.²⁹¹

3.6.2 Sikhs

ISKP has claimed the following recent attacks on Sikhs:

- A ‘complex attack’ on a Sikh temple in Kabul on 25 March 2020²⁹²; the temple was full of up to 200 worshippers, with at least 25 people killed, including women and children in the attack using grenades and indiscriminate shooting.²⁹³

²⁸¹ Ali O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁸² HRW, Afghanistan: Prosecute Head of ISIS-linked Group, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸³ HRW, “No Safe Place”: Insurgent Attacks on Civilians in Afghanistan, May 2018, [url](#), pp. 1-2, 27-34; Stars and Stripes, ISIS in Afghanistan was ‘obliterated’ but fighters who escaped could stage resurgence, 10 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 48

²⁸⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 47-48

²⁸⁶ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 74

²⁸⁷ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 74

²⁸⁸ BBC, Afghanistan: Bomb kills 63 at wedding in Kabul, 18 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 74

²⁹⁰ UNAMA, United Nations Condemns Attack Targeting Civilians at Commemoration Event, 6 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹¹ Pajhwok, Daesh claims deadly attack on Mazari memorial, 7 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹² UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 74

²⁹³ Guardian (The), Afghanistan: dozens killed in attack on Kabul Sikh temple, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

3.6.3 Other examples of treatment of opponents, including perceived ‘infidels’, ‘apostates’, spies or other insurgents

- In June 2019, a religious scholar acting as head of the religious affairs department in Jalalabad city was shot and killed by ISKP militants.²⁹⁴
- In May 2020, the US blamed ISKP for a large-scale attack complex on an MSF-run Kabul hospital maternity ward in a largely Shia area which left 24 people dead. MSF stated that the gunmen systematically targeted the maternity ward, shooting women in their beds. The Afghan government disputed the US claim, stating that the Taliban and affiliate Haqqani were responsible, using ISKP to deflect their involvement; a claim which the Taliban denied. No group claimed responsibility.²⁹⁵
- On 12 May 2020, ISKP carried out a suicide bombing on a funeral in Nangarhar, which the group claimed targeted a ‘gathering of Afghan security forces and militiamen’²⁹⁶, killing an estimated 19²⁹⁷ to up to 32 people, with nearly 70 others wounded.²⁹⁸
- In Kabul, Islamic State claimed responsibility for a 2 June 2020 bomb attack on a mosque in the capital that killed two people, including a religious leader, and injured 8 civilians. On an IS-affiliated website the group stated that the prayer leader was targeted as ‘an apostate and evil propagating loyalty to the apostate Afghan government’.²⁹⁹ The mosque was among the most heavily guarded in the country in a central district of Kabul and the bombing occurred in the midst of a three day ‘ceasefire’ with the Taliban, during which attacks continued.³⁰⁰
- Also in June 2020, the group claimed responsibility for an attack on a local TV station’s bus, which killed two employees and injured four; ISKP stated that they were killed for their support of the ‘apostate’ government.³⁰¹

²⁹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 47

²⁹⁵ VOA, Islamic State Plotted Afghan Hospital Raid, US Says, 15 May 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Afghans say Taliban behind bloodshed, reject U.S. blame of Islamic State, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁶ VOA, Afghan Funeral Bombing, Hospital Raid Kill Dozens, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁷ UNAMA, Rising Civilian Casualty Numbers Highlight Urgent Need to Halt Fighting and Re-focus on Peace Negotiations, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁸ Tolonews, Nangarhar Funeral Bombing Death Toll Rises to 32, 13 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁹ AP, IS Claims Kabul Mosque Attack That Killed Prayer Leader, 5 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁰ Reuters, Afghans Condemn Killing of Prominent Cleric in Mosque Blast, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁰¹ AP, IS Claims Kabul Mosque Attack That Killed Prayer Leader, 5 June 2020, [url](#); AP, IS claims Afghan bus attack; civilians killed in new clashes, 31 May 2020, [url](#)

4. Other AGEs

4.1 Haqqani network

Haqqani network is a UN-designated terrorist organisation (Entry number TAe.012).³⁰² As previously mentioned in this report (See Chapter [2. The Taliban](#)) Haqqani maintains close ties with the Taliban and the head of the Haqqani network is the Deputy head of the Taliban, Sirajuddin Haqqani, a UN sanctioned/listed individual.³⁰³ It is described as a powerful faction of the Taliban.³⁰⁴ According to USDOD, the Haqqani Network continued to be integral part of Taliban's attacks against the Afghan Government in Kabul and eastern Afghanistan for instance the Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) attack on a convoy in Kabul on 5 September 2019 that killed a US service member. Since Sirajuddin Haqqani became the Deputy Leader of the Taliban in 2015, the Haqqani Network's 'influence has increased in areas outside of Haqqani's normal operating region: Paktika, Paktiya, and Khost Provinces in eastern Afghanistan.'³⁰⁵

Haqqani reportedly collaborates and keeps close contact with Al Qaeda despite the US-deal.³⁰⁶ The UN stated in May 2020 that there were indications that senior figures in Haqqani network and Al Qaeda were planning to create a joint unit of 2 000 fighters split into two divisions, one in Loya Paktiya (Khost, Logar, Paktiya, Paktika) and the other in Kunar and Nuristan.³⁰⁷

Haqqani and ISKP are reported to work together, according to Afghan officials, including a rocket attack on the Afghanistan Presidential inauguration and an assault on a Sikh temple in March 2020 that killed 25 people.³⁰⁸ Afghan intelligence officials stated in June 2020 that they busted a joint Haqqani-ISKP cell outside Kabul.³⁰⁹

In its quarterly report of 30 January 2020, SIGAR reported that Resolute Support attributed 91 % of the civilian casualties to AGEs including 4 % to Haqqani Network.³¹⁰ However, it is difficult to distinguish Haqqani attacks from Taliban attacks. According to UNAMA, Haqqani 'undertook attacks while maintaining a degree of operational independence'.³¹¹ It is believed to be responsible for complex attacks on both government and international targets in heavily populated areas of Kabul.³¹² For example, on 14 May 2020, 5 people were killed when a truck bomb exploded outside a military court in Gardez, Paktia, injuring dozens. The spokesman for the Afghan Interior Ministry blamed Haqqani and its ties to the Taliban, but the Taliban denied being involved.³¹³

³⁰² UNSC, United Nations Security Council Consolidated List – Generated on: 18 July 2020, 18 July 2020, [url](#), p. 150; For an narrative description of the group, see: UNSC, Haqqani Network, n.d., [url](#)

³⁰³ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), Annex, para. A; UNSC, Haqqani Network, n.d., [url](#)

³⁰⁴ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Spy Agency Says 'IS-Haqqani' Cell Busted in Kabul, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 25

³⁰⁶ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3; RFE/RL, UN Monitors: Taliban Maintains 'Close' Ties With Al-Qaeda Despite U.S. Peace Deal, 2 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁷ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 38

³⁰⁸ RFE/RL/Gandhara Afghanistan, Afghan Spy Agency Says 'IS-Haqqani' Cell Busted in Kabul, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Spy Agency Says 'IS-Haqqani' Cell Busted in Kabul, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 70

³¹¹ UNAMA clarifies that 'since 2017, UNAMA has attributed attacks believed to be committed by the Haqqani Network to the Taliban as the distinction could no longer be reliably established according to UNAMA's methodology for verifying and attributing civilian casualties'. UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 85

³¹² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 85

³¹³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Truck Bomb Kills At Least Five In Eastern Afghanistan, 14 May 2020, [url](#); Diplomat (The), The Taliban and al-Qaeda: Enduring Partnership or Liability?, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

According to an Iranian news source, the Haqqani Network counts around 4 000 fighters, who are actively based in Paktia, Khost, Kandahar, Helmand and eastern provinces, and carries out attacks in Kabul. The group is part of the *Quetta Shura* in Quetta city of Pakistan.³¹⁴

4.2 Al Qaeda and affiliates

Al Qaeda is a transnational extremist Salafist jihadist organisation and UN-designated terrorist group, (QDe.004) as are its affiliate branches.³¹⁵

Sources indicate that Al Qaeda maintains relations with the Taliban³¹⁶ and a limited presence in Afghanistan, carrying out its activities mostly under the umbrella of other AGEs, particularly the Taliban.³¹⁷ According to the Security Council, Al Qaeda and other foreign terrorists that are ‘aligned under the protection and influence of the Taliban’ poses a ‘long-term global threat’.³¹⁸ However, the Taliban denied having links to Al Qaeda and in the wake of the US agreement, in June 2020, it went so far as to deny that Al Qaeda even existed in Afghanistan.³¹⁹ Michael Semple, former UN advisor quoted by Foreign Policy magazine, stated that the Taliban has intensified its connections to Al Qaeda since signing the Doha agreement in February 2020.³²⁰ The UN also reported in May 2020 that some reporting indicated that the Taliban retained strong links with Al Qaeda, who embed advisors with them; the Taliban and Al Qaeda continued to hold meetings and make reassurances about their relationship through 2019.³²¹ In opposition to ISKP, Al Qaeda has sought to promote the Taliban’s *Emir* as the ‘more theologically correct’ leader for Afghan Muslims.³²²

According to the May 2020 report by the UN, Al Qaeda is ‘covertly active’ in 12 provinces with 400-600 armed operatives: Badakhshan, Ghazni, Helmand, Khost, Kunar, Kunduz, Logar, Nangarhar, Nimruz, Nuristan, Paktiya and Zabul.³²³

On 23 September 2019, Asim Omar, the leader of Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent was killed in a joint operation in Musa Qala District of Helmand Province during an attack against a joint Taliban-Al Qaeda meeting.³²⁴ On 11 May 2020, Tolonews quoted security officials claiming that Al Qaeda and Jaish-Mohammad group (based in Pakistan) fight alongside the Taliban against ANDSF in eastern provinces of Afghanistan including Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan Provinces. The Taliban denied the claim.³²⁵ In what the UN calls an ‘unusual move’, Al Qaeda released on its media site Thabat, a summary of attacks it claimed to have carried out in March 2020, which shows ‘hundreds of alleged attacks carried out in Afghanistan’ leading to ANSF casualties. The UN stated that the statistics appeared to be exaggerated.³²⁶

³¹⁴ ANA, *آشنایی با شبکه حقانی؛ تروریست‌هایی با مدیریت چنگانه* [‘Understanding the Haqqani Network, terrorists with a different administration’], 19 November 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁵ UNSC, United Nations Security Council Consolidated List – Generated on: 18 July 2020, 18 July 2020, [url](#), p. 139

³¹⁶ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 32 and 41

³¹⁷ UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 85-86

³¹⁸ UN Security Council, Letter to the Chair of the Security Council Committee - concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, S/2020/53, 20 January 2020, [url](#), para. 8

³¹⁹ Roggio, B., Taliban falsely claims Al Qaeda doesn’t exist in Afghanistan, 16 June 2020, LWJ, [url](#); Roggio, B., Analysis: Taliban is caught in a lie by denying Al Qaeda’s presence in Afghanistan, LWJ, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

³²⁰ FP, Factional Struggles Emerge in Virus-Afflicted Taliban Top Ranks, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

³²¹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 33

³²² Diplomat (The), The Taliban and al-Qaeda: Enduring Partnership or Liability?, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

³²³ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 33-34

³²⁴ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 36; Reuters, Afghanistan says Al Qaeda leader killed in September wedding party clash, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

³²⁵ Tolonews, Al Qaeda, Jaish-Mohammad aligned with Taliban in the East: officials, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

³²⁶ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 43

4.3 Foreign AGEs and fighters

The UN Security Council report from May 2020 stated that there are a number of ‘foreign terrorist groups’ that pose a ‘security threat’ in Afghanistan due to their operations, activities and ‘permanent presence’. While these groups may continue to pose a security threat to Afghanistan, according to the UN Security Council report, others were not a threat alone, but relied on affiliations with other groups to operate.³²⁷ These groups appear on the UN-designated sanctions list for terrorism.³²⁸

The main groups listed by the UN Security Council report that pose a security threat are:

- Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan with 500 fighters in Kunar and 180 in Nangarhar. This group also includes a number of loose splinter groups: Jamaat ul-Ahrar (JuA); Lashkar-e Islam; Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group; Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan-Hafeez Ullah Kochwan; Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan-Sajna; Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan-Punjab; Tariq Gidar Group (QDe.160); and Majlis-e Ahrar group;
- Jaish-eMohammed with 200 fighters;
- Lashkar-e Tayyiba with 800 fighters.

These groups are mainly located in the eastern provinces of Kunar, Nangarhar and Nuristan, ‘where they operate under the umbrella of the Afghan Taliban’ and facilitate the transit of fighters. They have also been involved in ‘targeted assassinations against government officials and others’.³²⁹ In April 2020, a key ISKP leader was arrested; he had been responsible for coordination and contact with other groups such as Lashkar-e Tayyiba, Sepa-i Sahaba, Jamiat-e Ulema-e Islam and the Peshawar Council of Taliban.³³⁰

There are also several central Asian and Uigher foreign terrorist and militant groups that present a ‘significant threat’ in northern areas of Afghanistan, with Uzbek, Tajik and Turkmen ethnicity and language which they have in common with countries in the region:

- Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement
- Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (also known as Jundullah)
- Jamaat Ansarullah Tajikistan
- Lashkar-e Islam
- The Salafist Group³³¹

Regarding the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the UN Security Council reported in 2020 that the IMU has ‘lost its independent status’ and is part of the Taliban forces carrying their activities in Faryab and Zabul Provinces. The group is currently led by Mohammad Yuldas, who is based in Almar District of Faryab Province. Since the group suffered material losses, its members engaged in criminal activities such as smuggling drugs via the northern route.³³² A local media source observed that in April 2020, two members of the IMU were arrested in Takhar province by the ANSF. Reportedly, they were planning to carry out an attack against the ANSF in Takhar.³³³

³²⁷ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 78

³²⁸ UNSC, United Nations Security Council Consolidated List – Generated on: 18 July 2020, 18 July 2020, [url](#), p. 172 (Qde. 132 – TTP), 153 (QDe.019 – Jaish-i-Mohammed), 159 (Qde. 118 – Lashkar-e-Tayyiba)

³²⁹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 79

³³⁰ Khaama Press, Key ISIS leader having links with Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e Taiba arrested in Afghanistan, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

³³¹ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 83-84

³³² UN Security Council, Letter to the Chair of the Security Council Committee - concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, S/2020/53, 20 January 2020, [url](#), para. 61

³³³ TKG, بازيادشت دو عضو حرکت اسلامی ازبکستان در تخار [‘two members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan arrested in Takhar’], 12 April 2020, [url](#)

The Eastern Turkistan Movement is largely located in Badakshan, Kunduz, and Takhar provinces, with 500 fighters mainly concentrated in Raghistan and Warduj districts of Badakshan.³³⁴

The Uzbek jihadist group Katibat Imam al-Bukhari (KIB) is also active in Afghanistan, operating in Faryab and Jowzjan, where Uzbeks are a large proportion of the population. The group has openly identified itself as part of the Taliban since 2018. In July 2020, the group released photos of several pro-government militia members whom it claimed to have captured in a joint attack with the Taliban.³³⁵

³³⁴ UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), para. 88

³³⁵ LWJ, Uzbek jihadist group claims capture of Afghan militiamen, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

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Annex II: Terms of Reference

Anti-Government Elements

- Overview
- Doha Agreement and recent developments

The Taliban

- Structure and leadership
- Strength, presence, territorial control, capacity
- Objectives and targeting
- Recruitment, including of children
- Human rights violations
- Targeted individuals
 - o Members of the Afghan security forces and pro-government militias
 - o Women in the ANSF
 - o Family members of the ANSF
 - o Government officials and those perceived as supporting the government, including officials, those seen as spies or government supporters
 - o People working for foreign militaries, such as interpreters
 - o Certain religious leaders

Islamic State Khorasan Province

- Structure and leadership
- Strength, presence, territorial control, capacity
- Capacity for attacks
- Objectives and targeting
- Recruitment, including of children
- Human rights violations
- Targeted individuals
 - o Shia Hazara
 - o Sikhs
 - o Other opponents such as perceived infidels

Other AGEs

- o Haqqani Network
- o Al Qaeda
- o Foreign AGEs

