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Country Report on Terrorism 2021 - Chapter 4 - Terrorist Safe Havens - Afghanistan

Terrorist and insurgent groups, including ISIS-K, elements of AQ (including affiliate al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent [AQIS]), and terrorist groups targeting Pakistan (such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan), continued to use Afghanistan, especially its remote regions, as a safe haven throughout 2021.

Before the withdrawal of U.S. forces and the Taliban takeover of Kabul, U.S. and Afghan security forces partnered in numerous counterterrorism efforts through Operation Freedom's Sentinel, and the Afghan government executed its own counterterrorism operations. After the Taliban takeover of Kabul, the danger of terrorist groups operating from safe havens in Afghanistan increased significantly. The Taliban itself remains a U.S. Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT), and several members of the Taliban are individually UN and/or U.S. designated terrorists. Haqqani Network, which is designated as an FTO and SDGT, has members and key leaders who have also assumed both formal and informal roles within the Taliban.

The Taliban has committed publicly to meet its Doha Agreement commitment to prevent any group or individual from using Afghan soil to threaten the security of the United States and its allies. However, the extent of the Taliban's ability to prevent AQ and ISIS-K from mounting external operations remained unclear. Though al-Qa'ida has weakened, its regional affiliate in the Indian subcontinent (AQIS) continued to operate from remote locations in Afghanistan that have served as safe havens.

ISIS-K increased high-profile attacks against civilians in Afghanistan both before and after the Taliban takeover of Kabul, often targeting vulnerable minority populations such as Hazara Shias. In November the UN said there were 334 attacks attributed to ISIS-K so far in the year, compared with 60 in 2020, and assessed that ISIS-K was present in nearly all the country's provinces. In August an ISIS-K suicide attack at Hamid Karzai International Airport killed 183 people, including 13 members of the U.S. military. ISIS-K was estimated to have 2,000 to 3,000 fighters in Afghanistan in 2021.

The potential for WMD trafficking and proliferation in Afghanistan remained a concern. Before August the United States helped the Afghanistan government enhance its capabilities to prevent, detect, and respond to nuclear and other radioactive material smuggling incidents. Before the Taliban takeover of Kabul, the Afghanistan and U.S. governments also continued to work to implement comprehensive strategic trade controls and to strengthen Afghanistan's border security; however, since the Taliban

takeover of Kabul, U.S.-Afghan cooperation in border security has ceased, potentially increasing the possibility of WMD trafficking.

ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on terrorism (covering 2021, excerpt of chapter 4 on "terrorist safe havens")

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