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European Asylum Support Office

Afghanistan Security situation

Country of Origin Information Report



SUPPORT IS OUR MISSION



Afghanistan

Security situation

Country of Origin Information Report

September 2020

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

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The IED Threat. The bomb disposal team of the Afghan Army 215 Corps neutralises an IED in Sangin, Helmand. With roadside bombs the largest threat in Afghanistan, the few teams that have been trained are being relied heavily on to keep the roads safe for troops and civilians.

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Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF)

Slovakia, Migration Office, Department of Documentation and Foreign Cooperation

The following external organisation reviewed parts of this report:

ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation

It must be noted that the review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or 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.

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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. To the extent possible and unless otherwise stated, all information presented, except for undisputed or obvious facts, has been cross-checked.

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

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular 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 target users are asylum caseworkers, COI researchers, policymakers, and decision-making authorities.

The drafting process (including reviewing) for this report was finalised on 31 July 2020. Any event taking place after this period 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.

Addenda and Corrigenda: On 9 October 2020, this report was re-published in order to correct some factual errors and to add some relevant information which was missing in the original version. The list of corrections and additions made can be found in [Annex 3](#).

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
ACC	Afghan Citizen Card
AGEs	Anti-Government Elements are individuals and armed groups involved in armed conflict with, or armed opposition against, the government of Afghanistan and/or international military forces. Examples of such groups include the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkari Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed and groups identifying themselves as Islamic State/‘Daesh’. ²
ALCS	Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey
ANASOC	Afghan National Army Special Operations Command
ANSF/ANDSF	Afghan National Security Forces/Afghan National Defense And Security Forces, an umbrella term which includes: ³ ABF (Afghan Border Force); ALP (Afghan Local Police); ANA (Afghan National Army); AAF (Afghan Air Force); ANP (Afghan National Police); ANCOF (Afghan National Civil Order Force); ASF (Afghan Special Forces); ANA TF (Afghan National Army Territorial Force); NDS (National Directorate of Security)
AQ	Al Qaeda
Attrition	Attrition is unplanned and planned total losses, including Dropped from Rolls, Killed in Action, Separation, and Other losses [disappearance/captured, disability, death (not in action), retirement, exempted (i.e. AWOL or permanent medical), or transfer to the ANA/ANP] ⁴
AWOL	Absent Without Leave ⁵
Civilian	UNAMA refers to international law for a definition of ‘civilians’: persons who are not members of military/paramilitary forces or members of organised armed groups with continuous combat function and are protected against direct attacks unless and for such time as they directly participate in hostilities. ⁶

² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 59, 61

³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 61

⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 42

⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 43

⁶ UNAMA Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 62

CTC	US Combating Terrorism Center
DFR	Dropped from Rolls personnel are those soldiers and police who leave the organisation prior to the end of their contract for reasons that include desertion or being absent without leave for over a month. ⁷
<i>Eid ul-Fitr</i>	‘Festival of breaking the fast’ that marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan
ETIM	East Turkestan Islamic Movement
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
GIROA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Ground engagements	Ground engagements include kinetic ground operations, stand-off attacks, crossfire and armed clashes between parties to the conflict. Ground engagements include attacks or operations in which small arms, heavy weapons and/or area weapons systems, i.e. mortars and rockets are fired. ⁸
HIG	Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar
IEC	Independent Election Commission
IED	Improvised Explosive Device. A bomb constructed and deployed in ways other than in conventional military action. IEDs can broadly be divided into four categories: Command-Operated IEDs – Radio or remote-controlled IEDs operated from a distance that can enable operators to detonate a pre-placed device at the precise time a target moves into the target area. Magnetic-IEDs are IEDs attached by a magnetic or other device and are a sub-category of command-operated IEDs. Victim-Operated IEDs – These detonate when a person or vehicle triggers the initiator or switch which could be a pressure plate (PP-IED) or pressure release mechanism, trip wire or another device, resulting in an explosion. Other IEDs – This category includes command-wired IEDs and timed-IEDs and IEDs where the trigger/switch type for detonation could not be determined. Suicide IEDs – Separately from data on IEDs, UNAMA documents civilian casualties resulting from complex and suicide attacks. Suicide IEDs are generally either Body-Borne IEDs (BB-IEDs) or Suicide Vehicle-Borne IEDs (SVB-IEDs). Body-Borne IEDs refer to situations where a suicide bomber wears an explosive vest or belt while Suicide Vehicle-Borne IEDs is defined as the detonation of a vehicle rigged with explosives by a driver or passenger inside the vehicle, or the detonation of a BB-IED by the driver or a passenger while inside the vehicle.⁹
IEHCA	Islamic Emirate High Council of Afghanistan

⁷ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 43

⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 63

⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices, October 2018, [url](#), p. 10

IMF	International Military Forces
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IS, ISKP	Islamic State, also called ISIS, ISIL or Daesh. Islamic State in Afghanistan is referred to as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).
Khost Protection Force	A 'campaign force' that was established after 2001 under international (CIA/US special forces) control. There are long-standing allegations against the Khost Protection Force of extrajudicial killings, torture, beating and unlawful detentions. ¹⁰
KIA	Killed in Action ¹¹
LeJ	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi
LeT	Lashkar-e-Tayyiba
Loya Paktia	'Greater Paktya', an area encompassing the provinces of Paktya, Paktika and Khost
NUG	National Unity Government
NSIA	National Statistics and Information Authority (formerly Central Statistics Organisation, CSO)
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OFS	Operation Freedom's Sentinel
PGF	Pro-Government Forces. Afghan National Security Forces and other forces and groups that act in military or paramilitary counter-insurgency operations and are directly or indirectly under the control of the government of Afghanistan ¹²
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
Red Unit/Red Brigade	In 2015, the Taliban established a 'special forces' unit named Red Unit or Red Brigade ('sra qet'a' in Pashto). They are better equipped and trained and are generally used as a 'rapid reaction force'. ¹³
RS	Resolute Support; a NATO-led mission
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
TAAC	Train, Advise, and Assist Command
TTP	Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan
USDOD	United States Department of Defense
USDOS	United States Department of State
Ushr	An Islamic tax (normally 10 %) on certain products, for example agricultural products.

¹⁰ Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 32

¹² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 64

¹³ Times (The), Helmand teeters after Taliban storm in with British tactics, 21 August 2016, [url](#)

Introduction

This report was co-drafted by EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) sector and specialists from the COI units and asylum offices listed in the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

The report aims to provide information on the security situation in Afghanistan, which is relevant for the assessment of international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection, and in particular for use in EASO's country guidance development on Afghanistan. The terms of reference can be found in [Annex 2](#).

Methodology

This report is an update of the EASO COI report Afghanistan Security Situation first published in January 2015 and updated annually.¹⁴

For the assessment of the need for international protection, the terms of reference for this report have been developed with a focus on the key elements from Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive (QD).

Based on various sources consulted by EASO¹⁵, these key elements can be broken down into topics and/or indicators. Examples include: parties to the conflict; intensity level of the violence; nature of the violence; regional spreading of the violence; targets of the violence; risk of collateral damage; use of arms and tactics; possibility to reach areas – security of transport (roads and airports); and indirect effects of the violence/conflict.

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

EU+ countries'¹⁶ COI specialists, policy and decision experts and UNHCR gave input on the terms of reference.

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources. The reference period for the description of latest trends and illustrative incidents is from 1 March 2019 until 30 June 2020. Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 31 July 2020.

This report is produced in line with the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019)¹⁷ and the EASO COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019).¹⁸ In order to ensure that the drafters respected the EASO COI Report Methodology, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report.

¹⁴ EASO COI reports are available via EASO's website: [url](#)

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

¹⁶ EU+ countries are the EU Member States plus the associated countries Norway and Switzerland.

¹⁷ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸ EASO, Writing and Referencing Guide for EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, [url](#)

Sources

For data on **civilian casualties**, the two main sources used in this report are the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and NATO Resolute Support (RS) mission/ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). In addition, to illustrate examples of incidents which caused civilian casualties in some provinces, information from The New York Times' Afghan War Casualty Report was used. The Afghan War Casualty Report is a weekly and monthly bulletin compiling 'all significant security incidents confirmed by New York Times reporters throughout Afghanistan'. As New York Times clarifies 'the report includes government claims of insurgent casualty figures, but in most cases these cannot be independently verified by The Times. Similarly, the reports do not include Taliban claims for their attacks on the government unless they can be verified.'¹⁹ Information from Voice of Jihad,²⁰ the Taliban's official website, was also used in the report mainly to illustrate examples of incidents causing civilian casualties in some provinces.

UNAMA:

This report relies extensively on data and information provided by UNAMA in their reports on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan. UNAMA uses a robust methodology to verify reported incidents by corroborating and cross-checking incidents, conducting on-site investigations, and consulting a broad range of credible and reliable sources. For verification of each incident involving a civilian casualty, UNAMA requires at least three different and independent sources. Unverified incidents are not included in its reporting.²¹ According to analysts, this stringent verification standard also means 'there may be many more casualties than UNAMA is able to confirm.'²²

For data on **violent incidents**, publicly available curated datasets from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) have been used.

ACLED:

ACLED is a project collecting, analysing and mapping information on crisis and conflict in Africa, south and south-east Asia and Middle East and provides datasets on conflict incidents.²³ Its methodology applied for coding and monitoring of the data is explained in details in its Codebook.²⁴ As ACLED points out, the reader should, however, be aware of some limitations in the data. These limitations are:

'the first is that most of the data is gathered based on publicly available, secondary reports. This means that the data is in part a reflection of the coverage and reporting priorities of media and international organisations. One of the effects of this is that it may under-estimate the volume of events of non-strategic importance (for example, low-level communal conflict, or events in very isolated areas). We work to address this possibility by triangulating data sources to include humanitarian and international organisation reports, rather than media alone; and by conducting ground-truthing exercises in which we present data to local organisations and partners to assess its validity among people working directly in conflict-affected contexts.'²⁵

Therefore, ACLED's figures in this report are to be considered as an estimate and indication of trends in violence over a given period of time.

¹⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰ Voice of Jihad, [English], n.d., [url](#)

²¹ UNAMA's full description of their methodology can be found at: UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. i-ii

²² Bjelica, J. and Ruttig, T., UNAMA Mid-Year Report 2017: Number of civilian casualties still at "record level", 18 July 2017, [url](#)

²³ ACLED, About Acled, n.d., [url](#)

²⁴ ACLED methodology, see ACLED Codebook [url](#)

²⁵ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Guide for Media Users, January 2015, [url](#), pp. 9-10

For Afghanistan, ACLED covers political violence and protest spanning from January 2017 to the present. Each week, ACLED researches and reviews about 60 sources in English and Dari/Farsi on political violence in Afghanistan and collects the information into a database.²⁶

ACLED codes security incidents as follows:

- *Battles*: violent clashes between at least two armed groups. Battles can occur between armed and organised state, non-state, and external groups, and in any combination therein. Sub-events of battles are armed clashes, government regains territory and non-state actor overtakes territory. The sub-event type ‘Armed clash’ occurs when ‘armed, organized groups engage in a battle, and no reports indicate a change in territorial control’.
- *Violence against civilians*: ‘violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants. “Violence against civilians” includes attempts at inflicting harm (e.g. beating, shooting, torture, rape, mutilation, etc.) or forcibly disappearing (e.g. kidnapping and disappearances) civilian actors. The following sub-event types are associated with the “Violence against civilians” event type: “Sexual violence”, “Attack”, and “Abduction/forced disappearance”.’
- *Explosions/remote violence*: events where an explosion, bomb or other explosive device was used to engage in conflict. They include one-sided violent events in which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the target to engage or defend themselves and their location. They include air/drone strikes, suicide bombs, shelling/artillery/missile attack, remote explosive/landmine/IED, grenade, chemical weapon.
- *Riots*: are a violent demonstration, often involving a spontaneous action by unorganised, unaffiliated members of society. They include violent demonstration, mob violence.
- *Protests*: public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them. It includes peaceful protests, protest with intervention, excessive force against protesters.
- *Strategic developments*: information regarding the activities of violent groups that is not itself recorded as political violence, yet it may trigger future events or contribute to political dynamics within and across states. It includes agreements, change to group/activity, non-violent transfer of territory, arrests.²⁷

Data on violent incidents reported in Chapter 2 of this report is based on EASO analysis of ACLED public data extracted on 7 July 2020. For the purpose of this report, only the following types of events were included as violent incidents in the analysis of the security situation in Afghanistan: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. The ACLED data, and maps derived from such data, used in this report refer to the timeframe between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.

On **territorial control by the Taliban** in Afghanistan, information collected and presented in a map by the Long War Journal (LWJ) was used in this report, alongside additional sources researched to the extent possible to corroborate the LWJ findings.

LWJ:

The LWJ is a project by the non-profit policy institute the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD).²⁸ The LWJ’s Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan is based on open-source information, such as press reports and information provided by government agencies and the Taliban. The LWJ classifies the level of control as follows:

“Unconfirmed” district [...] has some level of claim-of-control made by the Taliban, but either has not yet been—or cannot be— independently verified by LWJ research. A “Contested” district may mean that the government may be in control of the district center, but little else, and the Taliban controls large areas or all of the areas outside of the district center. A

²⁶ ACLED, Methodology and Coding Decisions around the Conflict in Afghanistan, (Version 3) March 2020, [url](#)

²⁷ ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, October 2017, [url](#), pp. 7-14

²⁸ LWJ, About us, n.d. [url](#)

“Controlled” district may mean the Taliban is openly administering a district, providing services and security, and also running the local courts.’²⁹

On **internal displacement**, the main source used is the ‘Internal Displacement due to Conflict’ data collection by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). The UNOCHA data reported in the displacement sections was extracted on the ‘accessed date’ indicated in the Bibliography.

Structure and use of the report

This report is not meant to be read as a whole. In the first part a [general description](#) is given on the security situation in Afghanistan including a geographical overview, which is then explained in greater detail in the second part, holding a [regional description](#) of geographic subdivisions (Kabul City and 34 provinces).

Provinces and districts

The provincial chapters in this report are organised alphabetically and have the following structure: a general description of the province contains information on the geography and population; the conflict background takes a longer term look at the security situation in a province, including the armed actors active in the province. A section on recent trends in the security situation describes the nature of the violence, targets, locations, and casualties within the timeframe from 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020. Finally, conflict-induced displacements are described in a separate section. Recent security incidents described in sub-sections should be read as illustrations of trends in the security situation and not as an exhaustive list of incidents.

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

There are a number of provinces and districts for which the administrative boundaries are unclear. For example, it is unclear whether the district of Gizab belongs to Uruzgan or Daykundi province.³⁰ Nor is it clear whether the district of Gormach belongs to Badghis or Faryab province.³¹

The Managing Director at Alcis, a company providing geographic information services with many years of experience in Afghanistan, contacted by OFPRA’s Information, Documentation and Research Division, stated in an e-mail in August 2017 that

‘there is not one unified agreed district and province boundary dataset currently in use. There are various ‘official’ versions. [...] The boundaries within these different datasets have changed over time. Some districts have been passed across to other provinces for administrative purposes. Some new districts have been created over time. Some areas within Afghanistan are still referred to as districts by locals of the area, even though they have never had boundaries created for them and never been treated as a district.’³²

In absence of an official list of districts, EASO chooses in principal to follow the administrative divisions of the provinces used by UNOCHA, as they produce very clear maps and use the same division systematically in all their publications.³³

²⁹ More information on the methodology used by LWJ can be found at: LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, Methodology, n.d., [url](#)

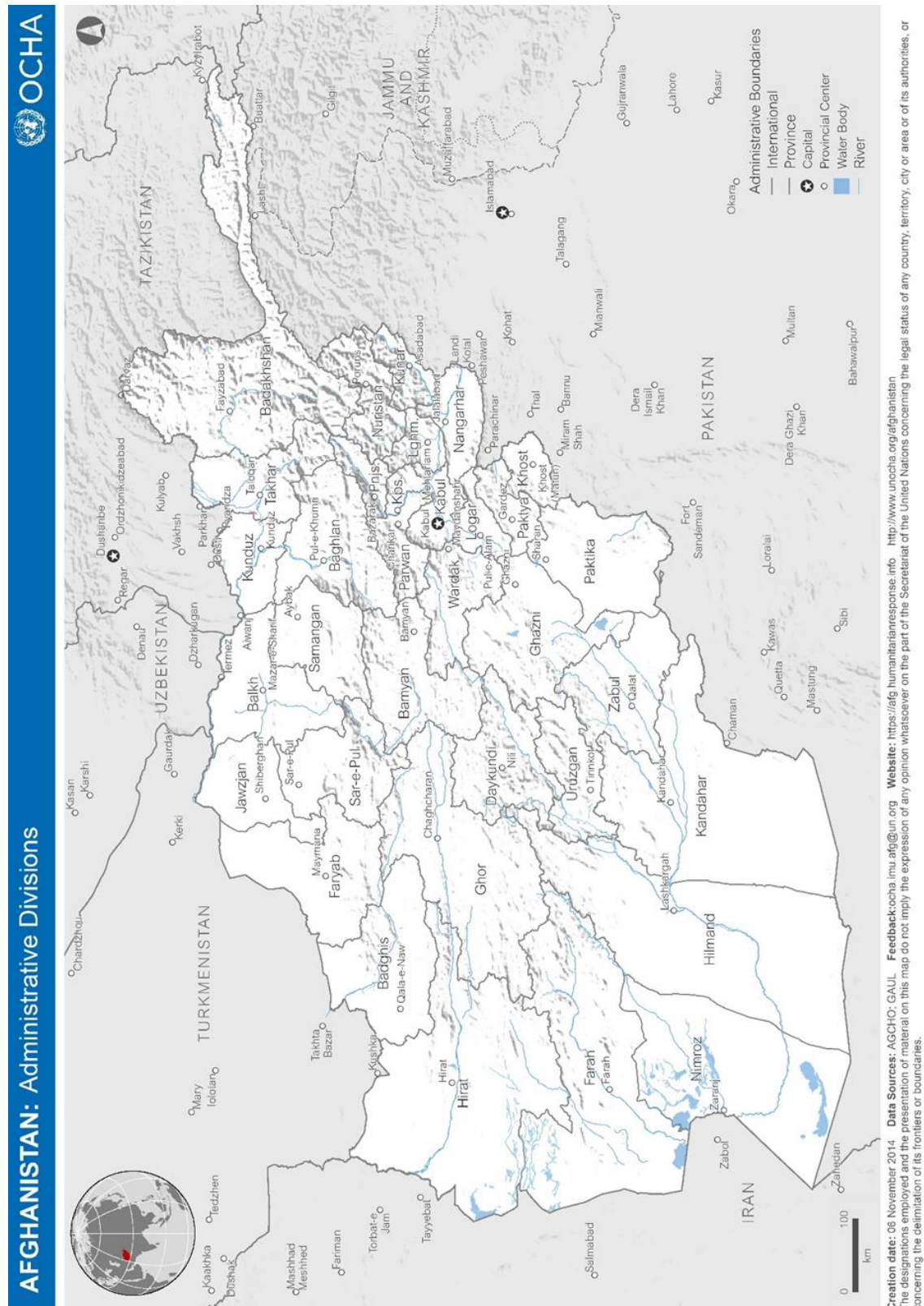
³⁰ Norway, Landinfo, Respons. Afghanistan: Gizab-distriktet, 11 December 2014, [url](#)

³¹ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

³² Brittan, R., Managing Director Alcis, e-mail to OFPRA, 16 August 2017

³³ All relevant maps on Afghanistan by UNOCHA can be found at: UNOCHA, Maps/Infographics – Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#)

Map



Map 1: Afghanistan - administrative divisions, source: UNOCHA³⁴

³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - administrative divisions, January 2014, [url](#)

1. General description of the security situation in Afghanistan

1.1 Background of the conflict

1.1.1 Overview of recent conflicts in Afghanistan

The so-called *Saur* Revolution on 27 April 1978 brought the Afghan communists to power.³⁵ In 1979, the government of the former Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to support the communist Afghan government headed by Babrak Karmal. The invasion was followed by a decade of armed conflict between the Afghan government, supported by Soviet troops, and armed opposition groups, often referred to as the ‘mujahideen’. These groups were divided into several different factions, but they all participated in a nation-wide armed uprising that lasted until the government finally collapsed in 1992, following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989.³⁶

After this collapse, a period generally referred to as ‘Civil War’ saw different *mujahidin* groups who had formed new alliances and fronts fighting for control of Afghanistan.³⁷ War between the competing *mujahidin* factions and militias was characterised by severe human rights breaches.³⁸ This led to the emergence in 1994 of a group called the Taliban, who brought stability in areas under their control, which won them support from segments of the population.³⁹ They gradually gained more control and conquered Kabul in 1996. By 2001, the Taliban controlled most of the Afghan territory. But by the end of the year, as a consequence of the 11 September attacks in the US, they were ousted by a US-led military operation.⁴⁰ The US gave its support to the mujahideen front opposing the Taliban, at that time known as Northern Alliance or Northern Coalition.⁴¹

On 22 December 2001, based on the Bonn Agreement, an Afghan interim government was formed, led by Hamid Karzai⁴², a Pashtun, who also won the first presidential elections in October 2004.⁴³ The Taliban had reorganised and increased their presence substantially by 2006 in Wardak, Logar, Zabul and Uruzgan provinces and began expanding along the western edge of Kabul province.⁴⁴ Other anti-government elements (AGEs) operating in Afghanistan included Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG), the Haqqani Network⁴⁵ and Al Qaeda affiliates, including Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).⁴⁶ This

³⁵ Clark, K., An April Day that Changed Afghanistan 2: Afghans remember the ‘Saur Revolution’, AAN, 27 April 2018, last updated 9 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁶ Barfield, T., A Cultural and Political History, 2010, p. 234; BBC News, Afghanistan profile – Timeline, updated on: 9 September 2019, [url](#); Ipsos/ICRC, Our world. Views from the field. Summary report: Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Georgia, Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia and the Philippines. Opinion Survey, June 2009, [url](#), p. 10; Oxfam International, The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009, November 2009, [url](#), pp. 7-9.

³⁷ BBC News, Afghanistan profile – Timeline, updated on: 9 September 2019, [url](#); HRW, Afghanistan: Crisis of Impunity, July 2001, [url](#), pp. 13-17; International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url](#), p. 3

³⁸ Oxfam International, The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009, November 2009, [url](#), p. 10

³⁹ Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: Drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, January 2012, [url](#), p. 22.

⁴⁰ CFR, The Taliban in Afghanistan, 4 July 2014, [url](#)

⁴¹ International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url](#), p. 5

⁴² Oxfam International, The Cost of War, Afghan Experiences of Conflict, 1978-2009, November 2009, [url](#), p. 13; UNAMA, Eighth Anniversary Today of 2001 Afghan Interim Authority, 22 December 2009, [url](#)

⁴³ Guardian (The), The Afghan interim government: who’s who, 6 December 2001, [url](#); NYT, Election of Karzai Is Declared Official, 4 November 2004, [url](#)

⁴⁴ International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url](#), p. 7

⁴⁵ International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url](#), pp. 14-15

⁴⁶ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 18 June 2014, [url](#), p. 6.

insurgency was characterised by mainly asymmetric warfare: AGEs used roadside and suicide bombs and complex⁴⁷ attacks, intimidation of civilians and targeted killings to destabilise the country. This was countered by searches, clearance operations and bombings by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and international military forces.⁴⁸ According to the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), the security situation deteriorated after 2005. The conflict deepened throughout 2007 and 2008, directly affecting around a third of the country.⁴⁹

From 2010 onwards, the Taliban-led insurgency spread into all regions of Afghanistan.⁵⁰ By the end of 2014, a transition of security responsibility from international troops to the ANSF was completed. The support for the further development of the ANSF continued ‘under a new, smaller non-combat NATO-led mission (“Resolute Support”)’.⁵¹ After the 2014 international military withdrawal, the Taliban have rapidly expanded their presence countrywide.⁵² A 2017 report by UN Secretary General noted that the Taliban had been able to control larger parts of the country and the emergence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant - Khorasan Province (ISKP) added ‘a new, dangerous dimension’ to the situation.⁵³ In 2018, fighting intensified particularly in the east, south-east and in some areas within the south. The Taliban ‘made territorial gains in sparsely populated areas, and advanced their positions in areas that had not seen fighting in years’.⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch noted that although the Taliban claimed to target government and foreign military facilities only, their indiscriminate use of force killed and injured hundreds of civilians.⁵⁵

On 29 February 2020, after more than 18 years of conflict, the US and the Taliban signed an ‘agreement for bringing peace’ to Afghanistan (for more details on the so-called Doha agreement see [1.1.3 Peace Talks](#)).⁵⁶ During the ‘reduction in violence’ (RiV) week, from 22 to 28 February 2020, a drop in security incidents was recorded between the pro-government forces and the Taliban.⁵⁷ However, after the RiV ended with the signature of the Doha agreement, the Taliban stated that ‘the war would continue’ not against foreign troops, but against the Afghan government.⁵⁸ The Taliban’s Military Commission reportedly sought assurances from the main Taliban leadership that fighting will continue regardless of the agreement.⁵⁹ Violence resumed immediately after the RiV ended.⁶⁰

1.1.2 Political landscape

The disputed 2014 presidential election resulted in a political compromise which led to the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG), under the presidency of Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. Divisions within the government, particularly between Ghani and Abdullah and their camps, severely compromised the NUG’s effectiveness.⁶¹ According to AAN, in January 2017, ‘its complex power-sharing arrangements [have] paralysed governance in

⁴⁷ See [Glossary](#)

⁴⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014, [url](#), pp. 5, 9, 21

⁴⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Annual Report On Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2008, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁰ UN, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, [url](#), p. 2

⁵¹ NATO, Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead, updated on: 7 January 2015, [url](#)

⁵² International Crisis Group, Afghanistan: Growing Challenges, 30 April 2017, [url](#)

⁵³ UN, Special report on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 10 August 2017, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 8

⁵⁵ HRW, World Report 2019 - Afghanistan, 17 January 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁶ BBC News, Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18-year war, 29 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, First Quarter Report: 1 January- 31 March 2020, June 2020, p. 3; AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended? 21 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸ AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended? 21 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁹ 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

⁶⁰ Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

⁶¹ Foreign Policy, NUG One Year On: Struggling to Govern, 29 September 2015, [url](#)

Afghanistan.⁶² A series of violent events in Kabul in May-June 2017 caused a political crisis, resulting in a 'significant shift in the political climate' marked by a rift between President Ghani and key members of the Jamiaat-e Islami party.⁶³ The crisis also resulted in the consolidation of power within the NUG⁶⁴ and in the first eight months of 2017, the government made progress on high-level appointments, which had previously been a source of tension.⁶⁵

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) set a date for the next parliamentary and district council elections in July 2018.⁶⁶ However, as a result of security challenges and voter registration reforms the long-delayed parliamentary elections were rescheduled again to October 2018.⁶⁷ Parliamentary elections were held in 32 provinces on 20-21 October 2018.⁶⁸ Voting in Kandahar was delayed by a week after the assassination of the provincial police chief in a Taliban-claimed attack two days before the original date of the elections.⁶⁹ Voting in Ghazni was postponed indefinitely due to security issues and disagreements around constituencies.⁷⁰

Although voter turnout in Kabul and other urban centres was reportedly high, technical and organisational problems occurred at some of the roughly 4 900 polling stations across the country. In some polling stations machines registering fingerprints and portrait photos aiming to prevent double voting did not function properly while in others election staff had difficulties handling them.⁷¹

In December 2018, the IEC announced a three-month delay for the presidential election which was originally scheduled for 20 April 2019.⁷² In March 2019, the elections were postponed again, due to 'problems with the voting process'.⁷³ Presidential candidates included incumbent Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, former national security adviser, Muhammad Hanif Atmar and also Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.⁷⁴ Interior Minister Amrullah Saleh, once a strong critic of the President stepped down from his position to join Ghani's team as a candidate for the post of vice-president.⁷⁵ Appointing Saleh was an effort from the ethnic Pashtun Ghani to neutralise a political opponent and to get the support of the Tajiks, among whom Saleh has a strong backing.⁷⁶

On 28 September 2019, the presidential elections were finally held, with the lowest election turnout recorded since the Taliban were ousted in 2001. In the immediate aftermath of the elections, both frontrunners, incumbent Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, declared victory⁷⁷, which resulted in the following five months of political impasse.⁷⁸ After almost three months since the elections, and with delays due to allegations of fraud, irregularities, attacks and technical problems with biometric devices used for voting⁷⁹, on 22 December 2019, the IEC announced the preliminary results showing 50.64 % of the votes (923 868) in favour of Ghani and 39.52 % of the votes (720 990)

⁶² AAN, What to Watch? Key issues to follow in Afghanistan in 2017, 27 January 2017, last updated 9 March 2020, [url](#)

⁶³ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁴ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁵ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 June 2017, [url](#), p. 2; UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 2

⁶⁶ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 13

⁶⁷ Al Jazeera, Afghanistan's elections: All you need to know, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁸ Tolo News, Ghazni Elections Could Be Held With Presidential Elections, 27 October 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁹ CNN, Kandahar goes to the polls in Afghan parliamentary vote delayed by violence, 27 October 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁰ Tolo News, Ghazni Elections Could Be Held With Presidential Elections, 27 October 2018, [url](#)

⁷¹ Diplomat (The), Afghan Parliamentary Elections Marred by Technical Troubles and Insecurity, 21 October 2018, [url](#)

⁷² France24, Afghan presidential election delayed until July 20, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

⁷³ Reuters, Afghanistan presidential election postponed to September, 20 March 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁴ Adili, A.Y., Afghanistan's 2019 elections (2): Who is running to become the next president?, AAN, 11 February 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁵ NYT, Afghan Presidential Race Takes Shape as Ghani's Challengers Emerge, 18 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶ Reuters, Afghanistan's Ghani launches bid for second presidential term, 20 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁷ BBC, Afghanistan presidential election: Rivals declare victory after record low turnout, 30 September 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁸ Adili A. Y., End of post-election impasse? Ghani and Abdullah's new power-sharing formula, AAN 20 May 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁹ Reuters, Afghan election runoff likely amid thousands of complaints: officials, 23 December 2019, [url](#)

in favour of Abdullah Abdullah.⁸⁰ This latter rejected the preliminary results, stating they were based on fraud.⁸¹ The election turnover was estimated to be over 1.8 million⁸², with 31.5 % being composed of women.⁸³

After three days since the announcement of the preliminary results, IEC said to have registered around 16 500 complaints.⁸⁴ The final results were announced in February 2020, confirming almost exactly the preliminary outcome.⁸⁵ Incumbent Muhammad Ashraf Ghani was declared the winner, with 50.64 % of votes. His rival Abdullah Abdullah, who was second with 39.52 % of votes⁸⁶, rejected the results, declaring himself the winner⁸⁷; he announced his intention to form an alternative, ‘inclusive’ government, and in the following weeks started appointing some provincial governors.⁸⁸ On 9 March 2020, both Ghani and Abdullah held separate inauguration ceremonies taking the oath of office as the president of Afghanistan.⁸⁹

After months of tension, on 17 May 2020, President Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, finally signed a power-sharing agreement.⁹⁰ Under agreement, Abdullah is to lead the peace negotiations, becoming the leader of the High Council of National Reconciliation with executive authorities; in addition he has the right to appoint 50 % of the cabinet⁹¹, including for some key ministries, while provincial governors will be appointed based on ‘a rule agreed upon by the two sides’. However, as of 13 June 2020, AAN’s researcher Ali Yawar Adili and co-Director Thomas Ruttig observed that it was not clear yet whether such a rule had been put in place, noting that a cabinet had yet to be fully formed.⁹²

1.1.3 Peace talks

After the collapse of the Doha peace talks in June 2013, talks did not resume before the new president, Ashraf Ghani, was inaugurated in September 2014.⁹³ In January 2015, the Taliban stated that its preconditions for entering peace talks were the end of foreign military presence, the establishment of an Islamic government and the implementation of *sharia*.⁹⁴ After the death of Mullah Omar was revealed in July 2015, a power struggle broke out within the Taliban which, at least in part, prevented further progress in the peace talks.⁹⁵

In January 2016, the US, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China formed a Quadrilateral Coordination Group to take forward the peace talks. However, the Taliban refused to engage with this process.⁹⁶ In

⁸⁰ BBC, Afghanistan presidential election: Ghani set for second term after initial results, 22 December 2019, [url](#); TKG, The preliminary results of the Afghanistan presidential elections announced, 22 December 2019, [url](#)

⁸¹ Reuters, Afghanistan’s Ghani claims narrow win in preliminary presidential vote results, 22 December 2019, [url](#)

⁸² Reuters, Afghan election runoff likely amid thousands of complaints: officials, 23 December 2019, [url](#)

⁸³ UN Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security A/74/753–S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁸⁴ Adili A. Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (28): ECC starts final, decisive phase of complaints procedure, AAN, 20 January 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁵ Ruttig T., Afghanistan’s 2019 Elections (30): Final results... and parallel governments?, AAN, 19 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁶ IEC, Afghanistan 2019, Presidential election, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁷ Ruttig T., Afghanistan’s 2019 Elections (30): Final results... and parallel governments?, AAN, 19 February 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Ghani named winner of disputed Afghan poll, rival also claims victory, 18 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security A/74/753–S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#) p. 3; Tolonews, Abdullah-Loyal governor installed in Sar-e Pul, 22 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁹ NYT, Ghani Takes the Oath of Afghan President. His Rival Does, Too, 9 March 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁰ A Adili A. Y., End of post-election impasse? Ghani and Abdullah’s new power-sharing formula, AAN 20 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹¹ A Adili A. Y., End of post-election impasse? Ghani and Abdullah’s new power-sharing formula, AAN 20 May 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Ghani and Abdullah Sign Agreement to Break Political Deadlock, 17 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹² Adili A. Y., Ruttig T., Between Professionalism and Accommodation: The slow progress on the new cabinet, AAN, 13 June 2020, [url](#)

⁹³ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁴ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 27 February 2015, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁵ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017, [url](#), p. 4

⁹⁶ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017, [url](#), p. 3

September 2016, the government signed a peace deal with Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG). Describing HIG as a 'fading insurgent group', Borhan Osman explained in 2016 the likely effect of this deal on the battlefield as 'unlikely to significantly lower the current levels of violence'.⁹⁷ In 2017, President Ghani offered the Taliban a 'last chance' for reconciliation at the 'Kabul-process', 'an international conference aiming to set the stage for peace talks and restore security in Afghanistan'.⁹⁸ However, according to a September 2017 report of the UN Secretary General 'no discernible progress has been made in fostering negotiations between the Government and the Taliban.'⁹⁹

In February 2018 the Afghan government presented very 'concrete proposals for peace talks with the Taliban' which, according to AAN, was 'the most complete peace offer that has been publicly announced since 2001'. Although President Ghani's peace plan was offered 'without any preconditions', it was made clear that issues as women's rights or the basic values of the constitution were not up for negotiation. While the proposal included the prospect of establishing a Taliban office in Kabul, the possibility of a ceasefire and also lifting the sanctions on those Taliban leaders who would join the negotiation, the Taliban accused Ghani of 'missing the point' namely their key demand on the withdrawal of foreign troops.¹⁰⁰ In June 2018, 'President Ghani called a unilateral halt to all offensive government actions' over the Muslim holiday of Eid ul-Fitr which the Taliban also joined.¹⁰¹ However, the Taliban rejected the President's idea of extending the ceasefire and continued to refuse official negotiations with the Afghan government.¹⁰²

International diplomatic efforts intensified towards peace with the appointment of Zalmay Khalilzad as the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation in September 2018¹⁰³ and with Russia hosting a meeting in November 2018 on the peace process that was attended by 11 countries and the Taliban as well.¹⁰⁴ Both tracks of negotiations continued in 2019. The Moscow meeting in the beginning of February 2019 brought together the Taliban delegation led by chief negotiator, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai and senior Afghan politicians led by former President Hamid Karzai. The talks were scheduled just a week after the US and the Taliban finished six days of negotiations in Qatar.¹⁰⁵

According to Thomas Ruttig, co-Director of AAN, while in Doha progress was being made in the form of an agreed draft framework, the negotiations so far did not involve the Afghan government, one of the main three parties to the conflict, since their inclusion is blocked by the Taliban.¹⁰⁶ The next round of talks, the highest level negotiations yet, began on 25 February 2019 between the insurgent group and the US involving Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban's deputy leader.¹⁰⁷

A consultative Loya Jirga – a gathering of Afghan politicians and tribal, ethnic and religious leaders - was initially planned in Kabul in March 2019 with the goal of creating a framework for the Afghan government to engage in peace negotiations with the Taliban. The Loya Jirga was eventually postponed.¹⁰⁸ In September 2019, US President Donald Trump declared the US-Taliban negotiations

⁹⁷ Osman, B., Peace With Hekmatyar: What does it mean for battlefield and politics?, AAN, 29 September 2016, [url](#)

⁹⁸ DW, Ashraf Ghani offers Taliban 'last chance' for peace, 6 June 2017, [url](#)

⁹⁹ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁰⁰ Ruttig, T. and Bjelica, J., Who shall cease the fire first? Afghanistan's peace offer to the Taleban, AAN, 1 March 2018, last updated 9 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ Clark, K., The Eid Ceasefire: Allowing Afghans to imagine their country at peace, AAN, 19 June 2018, last updated 9 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰² Ruttig, T., Getting to the Steering Wheel: President Ghani's new set of peace proposals, AAN, 4 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰³ USDOS, Zalmay Khalilzad - Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁰⁵ NYT, In Moscow, Afghan Peace Talks Without the Afghan Government, 4 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ Ruttig, T., "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed": First steps in Afghan peace negotiations, AAN, 4 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ NYT, U.S. and Taliban Begin Highest-Level Talks Yet on Ending Afghan War, 25 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ RFE/RL, Afghan Loya Jirga Aimed At Discussing Peace Talks Delayed, 3 March 2019, [url](#)

‘dead’¹⁰⁹, after the Taliban killed a US soldier; however, the discussions between the two sides resumed within weeks behind the scenes.¹¹⁰

On 29 February 2020, in Doha, the US and the Taliban signed the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan.¹¹¹ The main points outlined in the Doha agreement include guarantees by the Taliban on not providing protection to groups, such as Al Qaeda, that pose a threat to the US and its allies; guarantees by the US and their NATO allies to withdraw from Afghanistan; the question of ceasefire and the intra-Afghan negotiations.¹¹² However, the Afghan government was not involved in the deal, with the Taliban later refusing to engage with their negotiating team, leading to questions about the viability of the agreement, which is described as a ‘negotiated political settlement’ rather than a comprehensive peace deal.¹¹³

Simultaneously with the Doha Agreement, the US signed a joint declaration¹¹⁴ with the government of Afghanistan, as an attempt to involve the Afghan government in the discussions, enabling political settlement and a permanent ceasefire, while also affirming continued support to the Afghan security forces and refraining from intervention in domestic affairs.¹¹⁵

According to the Doha Agreement, all foreign military forces should withdraw from Afghanistan through a phased approach over 135 days, while in exchange, there should be mechanisms to prevent Afghanistan being used by group/individual security threats to the US and its allies (specifically the Taliban and Al Qaeda).¹¹⁶ The Agreement also stipulates that the modalities for a permanent ceasefire are to be negotiated in intra-Afghan negotiations, with a mutual release of prisoners proceeding such negotiations as a measure for confidence-building. Under the deal, the Afghan government is to release up to 5 000 Taliban prisoners; in exchange for 1 000 Afghan soldiers and police officers held by the Taliban. The prisoners release is described as a ‘core demand of the Taliban’ and a delicate issue for the intra-Afghan talks.¹¹⁷ AAN observed that there are ‘few obligations’ placed on the Taliban in the Agreement, adding that Taliban prisoner release deals also led to concerns of a return to violence.¹¹⁸

As of mid-June 2020, the Afghan government said to have released 3 000 prisoners, while the Taliban has freed 500. President Ghani also announced the decision to release additional 2 000 in order to pave the way for peace talks with the group.¹¹⁹ However, at the time of finalising this report, there was

¹⁰⁹ Ruttig T., US-Taliban Agreement Still in the Air: Disputes about a ‘ceasefire’ versus ‘reduction of violence’, AAN, 30 January 2020, last updated 9 April 2020 [url](#)

¹¹⁰ BBC News, Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18-year war, 29 February 2020, [url](#)

¹¹¹ The full text in English of the US-Taliban agreement, referred in this report as the ‘Doha agreement’ is available at: AAN, Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America, 29 February 2019, [url](#); 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](#)

¹¹² BBC News, Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18-year war, 29 February 2020, [url](#); Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, 3 March 2020, [url](#); Zeino E., Peace versus Democracy? Afghanistan between Government Crisis and a U.S. Peace Deal with the Taliban, Pajhow, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

¹¹³ US, CRS, Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief, 1 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-4; 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, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁴ The full text (in English, Dari, Pashtu) of the Joint Declaration between the US and the Afghanistan government is available at: AAN, Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan, 29 February 2020 [url](#)

¹¹⁵ Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ Zeino E., Peace versus Democracy? Afghanistan between Government Crisis and a U.S. Peace Deal with the Taliban, Pajhow, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ Afghanistan Times, More violence feared as freed Taliban inmates may return to the battlefield, 14 June 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ RFE/RL, Afghan President Says Taliban Prisoner Release To Be Completed Soon, 11 June 2020, [url](#)

reluctance among both Afghan and Western officials about releasing hundreds of Taliban prisoners considered as 'too dangerous'.¹²⁰

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.'¹²¹

At the time of drafting this report, there was little clarity as to the scope of the intra-Afghan negotiations. Five political groups put forward proposals, with the main themes being: 'structural framework, phases of the negotiation process and institutional arrangements'.¹²² 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.¹²³ At the beginning of July 2020, Abdullah Abdullah announced an official visit to Pakistan as part of the efforts to initiate the intra-Afghan talks, described as 'imminent'.¹²⁴

1.1.4 International context

In 2017, the US decided to slow down its troop withdrawal and, in August 2017, President Donald Trump promised to deploy more American troops to Afghanistan to continue to train Afghan forces.¹²⁵ However, in late December 2018, media reported that President Trump decided to withdraw around 7 000 troops from Afghanistan, about half of the remaining US force there.¹²⁶ As of December 2018, there were an estimated 14 000 US troops in Afghanistan.¹²⁷ Around 8 500 of them were part of the Resolute Support (RS) Mission, a 17 000-strong international NATO force tasked to train and advise the Afghan military.¹²⁸ As of June 2020, the RS troops in Afghanistan were around 16 000, 8 000 of which were US troops.¹²⁹ The total number of US troops present in the country at the moment of the Doha Agreement, in February 2020, was estimated to be between 12 000 and 13 000.¹³⁰

As part of the bilateral agreement signed between the US and the Taliban on 29 February 2020, the US agreed to reduce their troops from over 12 000 to 8 600 within 135 days (by mid-July 2020); NATO and other coalition forces would also reduce their presence proportionally; with the commitment of a total withdrawal of all US and NATO troops within 14 months (by April 2021), depending on 'action on the obligations' by the Taliban.¹³¹ On 18 June 2020, the US stated they had fulfilled their commitment

¹²⁰ Reuters, West reluctant for 'dangerous' Taliban prisoners to be freed: sources, 18 June 2020, [url](#); France24, Afghanistan says will not release 600 'too dangerous' Taliban, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

¹²¹ 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

¹²² Adili A. Y., Hossaini K., Looking ahead to Intra-Afghan Negotiations: A scrutiny of different political groups' plans for peace, AAN, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

¹²³ Reuters, Afghan government, Taliban agree to Doha as venue for first peace talks, 15 June 2020, [url](#); VOA, Prisoner Release Delays May Jeopardize Start of Intra-Afghan Negotiations, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁴ Tribune, Afghanistan's Abdullah Abdullah to visit Pakistan soon, 5 July 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁵ NYT, Trump Outlines New Afghanistan War Strategy with Few Details, 21 August 2017, [url](#); NYT, U.S. Says It Has 11,000 Troops in Afghanistan, More Than Formerly Disclosed, 30 August 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁶ RFE/RL, What Would A U.S. Troop Reduction In Afghanistan Mean?, 21 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁷ CNN, US military ordered to begin planning to withdraw about half the troops in Afghanistan, 21 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁸ NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, February 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁹ NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, June 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹³⁰ Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

¹³¹ Zeino E., Peace versus Democracy? Afghanistan between Government Crisis and a U.S. Peace Deal with the Taliban, Pajhwa, 6 April 2020, [url](#); Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

under the Doha Agreement of reducing their troops in Afghanistan to 8 600. As for the timeframe set for the full withdrawal of all US and foreign troops, US General Frank McKenzie, who oversees US forces in the region, said it was an ‘aspirational’ commitment.¹³²

In June 2020, NATO said they would reduce their troops from around 16 000 to around 12 000 during the course of the following months, in a ‘step-by-step and conditions-based process, reflecting the progress seen on the ground’. At the same time, NATO Allies and Resolute Support Mission confirmed their financial support to the Afghan security forces until the end of 2020.¹³³

In 2016-2017, Afghanistan’s relations with Pakistan were tense¹³⁴ and remained tenuous in 2018.¹³⁵ Both countries have been blaming each other for sheltering terrorists¹³⁶ and escalating border tensions resulted in Pakistan building a fence on the border to prevent the movement of militants.¹³⁷ USDOD noted that even though Pakistani military operations disrupted some militant safe havens, certain groups, such as the Taliban and the Haqqani Network enjoyed freedom of movement in Pakistan.¹³⁸ Following Imran Khan’s inauguration as Prime Minister of Pakistan in August 2018, the two countries continued efforts to improve their relations.¹³⁹ As part of a ‘confidence-building measure’ and showing that Pakistan opted for a constructive role in the Afghan peace talks, Islamabad released Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar who had been imprisoned since 2010. Mullah Baradar was appointed as a new leader for the Taliban’s political office in Qatar, effectively making him the chief negotiator on behalf of the insurgent group for the peace talks with the US.¹⁴⁰ However, in January 2019, President Ghani suggested that Pakistan was a safe haven for militants and their cross-border activities by saying that the ‘keys to war are in Islamabad, Quetta, [and] Rawalpindi.’¹⁴¹

During the US-Taliban negotiations, Pakistan played a key role helping to bring the Taliban to the table.¹⁴² In January 2019, during a visit to Pakistan, US Senator Lindsay Graham openly acknowledged Pakistan’s efforts to help the Afghan peace process.¹⁴³ Pakistan’s foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi took part at the signing of the agreement in Doha, ‘warmly congratulating both sides’.¹⁴⁴

Signs of improvement in the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan reportedly came with the visit by Pakistan’s military and intelligence chiefs to Kabul on 9 June 2020, which was described as an ice breaker for the relations between the two countries.¹⁴⁵ The visit occurred within the context of intra-Afghan peace dialogue which was set to start in mid-June.¹⁴⁶ At the beginning of July 2020, Abdullah Abdullah announced an official visit to Pakistan as part of the efforts to initiate the intra-Afghan talks.¹⁴⁷

In 2017, there were several accounts of both Russia and Iran actively supporting the Taliban.¹⁴⁸ Although Russia denied organising talks between Taliban representatives and an Afghan delegation

¹³² AP, US has hit agreed troop-cut target of 8,600 in Afghanistan, 18 June 2010, [url](#)

¹³³ NATO, NATO-Afghanistan relations, June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹³⁴ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 3 March 2017, [url](#), p. 4

¹³⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 23

¹³⁶ Daily Pakistan, Pakistan desires peace, stability in Afghanistan: Khawaja Asif, 2 September 2017, [url](#)

¹³⁷ Dawn, Pakistan holds ‘keys to war’, says Afghan president, 31 January 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 24

¹³⁹ UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁴⁰ RFE/RL, ‘Hopeful Moment’: How An ‘Afghan-Led, Afghan-Owned’ Peace Process Might Look, 29 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ Dawn, Pakistan holds ‘keys to war’, says Afghan president, 31 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴² Afzal M., Will the Afghan peace process be Pakistan’s road to redemption?, Brookings, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴³ VOA, Taliban, US Open Afghan Peace Talks in Qatar, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ Afzal M., Will the Afghan peace process be Pakistan’s road to redemption?, Brookings, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵ Tribune, Afghanistan’s Abdullah Abdullah to visit Pakistan soon, 5 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ AA, Pakistan’s military, intelligence chiefs visit Kabul, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ Tribune, Afghanistan’s Abdullah Abdullah to visit Pakistan soon, 5 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸ Business Insider, Russia appears to now be helping out the Taliban, 27 January 2017 [url](#); Washington Post (The), Russia is sending weapons to Taliban, top U.S. general confirms, 24 April 2017 [url](#); Wall Street Journal (The), Iran Backs Taliban With Cash and Arms, 11 June 2015 [url](#); VOA, Afghan Lawmakers to Investigate Growing Ties Between Taliban, Russia and Iran, 5

led by Hamid Karzai, Moscow hosted meetings on the peace process in November 2018 and February 2019 and according to RFE/RL it is 'highly unlikely such a high-profile event would be allowed to take place in Moscow without the Kremlin's blessing'.¹⁴⁹ Interviewed by the Washington Post, Carter Malkasian, a former senior adviser to American military commanders in Afghanistan, observed that Russia had cultivated relations with certain Taliban elements, mainly in northern Afghanistan, since the beginning of 2015. Russia's interest in keeping relations with the Taliban was partly due to their concerns over the threat posed by Islamic State groups in the region, but also because of their desire to see the US withdraw from Afghanistan.¹⁵⁰

At the end of June 2020, the New York Times revealed that Russian military intelligence unit offered bounties to militias linked to the Taliban for killing US and coalition forces in Afghanistan. US intelligence officials told the New York Times that the White House had already been briefed about the intelligence and the US National Security Council had discussed this issue at an interagency meeting in late March 2020.¹⁵¹ Following this revelation, both Russia and the Taliban denied the existence of the bounty program. US President Trump and his aides denied being ever briefed on the intelligence.¹⁵²

USDOD reported that Iran continued to pursue economic ties with the Afghan government, through trade, border security, and investment in shared railroad infrastructure; while at the same time continuing to provide support to the Taliban.¹⁵³ Tehran viewed the Taliban as a useful tool to resist US influence on its border. Providing military equipment to them was seen as putting enough pressure on the United States without the risk of military retaliation.¹⁵⁴ Iran has tried to strengthen its relationship with some Taliban factions also through economic, diplomatic, and security activities. However, following the US-Taliban agreement in Doha, in Tehran there are fears that some of most extreme elements of the Taliban – mostly Sunni who are not well disposed towards predominantly Shia Iran – can take power in a new central government which might result from infra-Afghan talks.¹⁵⁵

In an article analysing the latest developments in Afghanistan, in the light of the US-Taliban agreement and its impact on the democratic achievements of the country, Dr Ellinoir Zeino, noted that 'Afghanistan remains politically, militarily and financially dependent on foreign allies and vulnerable to external conflicts of power and interests.'¹⁵⁶

December 2016 [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Governor Accuses Iran Of Supporting Taliban, 31 July 2017, [url](#); Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017, [url](#), p. 9. Some observers are more sceptical about Russia's direct involvement. See: Atlantic (The), Is Russia Really Arming the Taliban?, 25 August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ RFE/RL, 'Intra-Afghan' Talks Under Way In Moscow Amid Continuing Violence, 5 February 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban: Russia meeting 'not about direct talks' with Kabul, 9 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ Washington Post (The), Russian bounties to Taliban-linked militants resulted in deaths of U.S. troops, according to intelligence assessments, 28 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ Zeino E., Peace versus Democracy? Afghanistan between Government Crisis and a U.S. Peace Deal with the Taliban, Pajhok, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ NYT, Russia Secretly Offered Afghan Militants Bounties to Kill U.S. Troops, Intelligence Says, 26 June 2020, updated 1 July 2020, [url](#); NYT, Trump Got Written Briefing in February on Possible Russian Bounties, Officials Say, 29 June 2020, [url](#); NYT, Suspicions of Russian Bounties Were Bolstered by Data on Financial Transfers, 30 June 2020, updated 3 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵² Washington Post (The), Russian bounties to Taliban-linked militants resulted in deaths of U.S. troops, according to intelligence assessments, 28 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 24

¹⁵⁴ USIP, Iran and Afghanistan's Long, Complicated History, 14 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵ Foreign Affairs, What Iran Wants in Afghanistan, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶ Zeino E, Peace versus Democracy? Afghanistan between Government Crisis and a U.S. Peace Deal with the Taliban, Pajhok Afghan News, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

1.2 Actors in the conflict

1.2.1 Pro-government forces

Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)

The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) or Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) are comprised of the Afghan National Army (including the Afghan Border Force, Afghan Air Force, Afghan Territorial Army, Afghan National Civil Order Force), Afghan National Police (including Afghan Local Police), and the National Directorate of Security (including the Afghan Special Force).¹⁵⁷ For more information on the Afghan security institutions, including their mandate and structure, integrity, and the main reported cases of violations perpetrated by these security forces, see [EASO COI Report Afghanistan, State Structure and Security Forces, August 2020](#).

Pro-government militias

UNAMA defines pro-government armed group as follows:

‘An organized armed non-State actor engaged in conflict in support of the Government and distinct from Afghan national security forces and criminal groups. Pro-Government armed groups do not include the Afghan Local Police, which fall under the command and control of the Ministry of Interior. These armed groups have no legal basis under the laws of Afghanistan and are not within the formal military structures of the Government of Afghanistan. In some cases, armed groups receive direct/indirect support of Government of Afghanistan or other States. This definition includes, but is not limited to, the following groups: “national uprising movements”, local militias (ethnically, clan- or otherwise-based), and civil defence forces and paramilitary groups.’¹⁵⁸

A specific local security structure that has existed in Afghan society for hundreds of years is the *arbaki*, community or tribal armies.¹⁵⁹ From the beginning of the insurgency, different paramilitary initiatives have been developed and formalised to support the Afghan government and assist the formal armed forces of Afghanistan. The government and international military forces have also relied on militias that are not part of any formal government entity, for conducting searches, night raids or executions. The formalised paramilitary initiatives have all ceased except for the ALP, now operating within the official security structures. The ‘term [*arbaki*] is now used for the ALP in many parts of the country.’¹⁶⁰

In 2015, the government developed a National Uprising Support Strategy to cover areas in Afghanistan where ANSF presence was limited. The NDS reportedly hired village or tribal elders to ‘propose “national uprising” group members, who NDS subsequently vets’. The strength of these armed groups varied from 22 to 500 fighters, commanded by NDS or ANP.¹⁶¹ The Afghan government, NDS and CIA are known to arm strongmen to fight the Taliban and other militants, but some militia leaders use their new power to fight local turf wars. According to the LA Times, various militias and personal armed groups also battle amongst themselves over political influence.¹⁶²

Reuters indicated that in the past years, more than 30 000 villagers were paid and armed by the government with the support of international forces to fight as militia groups against the Taliban across the country. Although the government disbanded militia groups and stopped paying them, many maintained their fight against the Taliban and ISKP. ‘The Taliban consider pro-government militia

¹⁵⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 62

¹⁵⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 91

¹⁵⁹ Seraj, A., Opinion: The Arbaki can secure Afghanistan better than the US, 5 November 2014, [url](#); HRW, Just Don’t Call It a Militia, September 2011, [url](#), pp. 13-14.

¹⁶⁰ HRW, Just Don’t Call It a Militia, 12 September 2011, [url](#); Habib, E., The Morphing of the Andar Uprising: transition to Afghan Local Police, AAN, 2 April 2013, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016, [url](#), pp. 65-66

¹⁶² LA Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, 31 October 2016, [url](#)

forces a big threat because they have strong intelligence networks, often both sides know each other's families.¹⁶³

AAN's co-Director Kate Clark described the Khost Protection Force as a 'campaign force' that was established after 2001 under international (CIA/US special forces) control. Similar militias include the Kandahar Strike Force and Paktika's Afghan Security Guards. There are longstanding allegations against the Khost Protection Force of extrajudicial killings, torture, beating and unlawful detentions.¹⁶⁴ UNAMA added that the Khost Protection Force functions outside of the regular military command and control structures.¹⁶⁵ In April 2020, Kate Clark noted:

'Despite the many pitfalls associated with local defence forces ... when they work, they work extremely well, producing determined fighters with local knowledge who protect the civilians in their areas and often stand their ground more than regular troops because they have nowhere else to retreat to.'¹⁶⁶

International military forces

UNAMA explains the scope of the term 'International Military Forces' as follows:

"International military forces" include all foreign troops forming part of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission as well as US Forces-Afghanistan who, in addition to participating in the Resolute Support Mission, are also engaged in counterterrorism operations as part of Operation Freedom's Sentinel. The term also encompasses Special Operations Forces and foreign agencies.'¹⁶⁷

From 2010, there was a gradual transition of security responsibilities from international forces to ANSF.¹⁶⁸ On 31 December 2014, ISAF's mandate expired and on 1 January 2015, this led to the transition from NATO's ISAF combat mission to a new non-combat mission, Resolute Support, with a focus on training, advising and assisting ANSF.¹⁶⁹ According to NATO, in February 2020, the total Resolute Support Mission strength was 15 937, with the goal to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces.¹⁷⁰ In total, 38 countries contribute to RS with the US, Germany and the UK as the largest contributors.¹⁷¹

In March 2020, Stars and Stripes reported that the US troops have started to move out from their bases in Helmand (Bost Airfield), Laghman (Gamberi base) and Herat province.¹⁷² On 1 July 2020, USDOD indicated that nearly 13 000 US military personnel were serving in Afghanistan as part of the US Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS) mission during the reporting period¹⁷³, around 8 000 of them were assigned to the NATO RS mission.¹⁷⁴ The USDOD added that by mid-July 2020, the number of US military personnel would reduce to 8 600 personnel in Afghanistan.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶³ Reuters, Taliban kill 14 pro-government militia in Afghanistan: Officials, 28 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 57

¹⁶⁶ VOA, 26 pro-government Afghans killed in fighting, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016, [url](#), p. 80

¹⁶⁸ NATO, Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead, updated on: 7 January 2015, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ NATO, Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, updated on: 27 February 2015, [url](#); UN Secretary-General, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, [url](#), p. 2.; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 83

¹⁷⁰ NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, 18 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷¹ NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, 18 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷² Stars and Stripes, US troops have left bases in Helmand, Laghman provinces, officials say, 13 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 10, footnote 3

¹⁷⁴ NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, 18 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 10, footnote 3

1.2.2 Anti-Government Elements

Information on the main Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) in Afghanistan, primarily the Taliban and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), including their *modus operandi*, structure, activities and targeted attacks can be found in [EASO COI Report Afghanistan, Anti-Government Elements \(AGEs\), August 2020](#).

1.3 Recent security trends and armed confrontations

According to ACLED data, between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 there were 15 287 security incidents recorded in Afghanistan, of whom 10 127 were coded as battles, 4 587 remote violence and 573 incidents of violence against civilians.

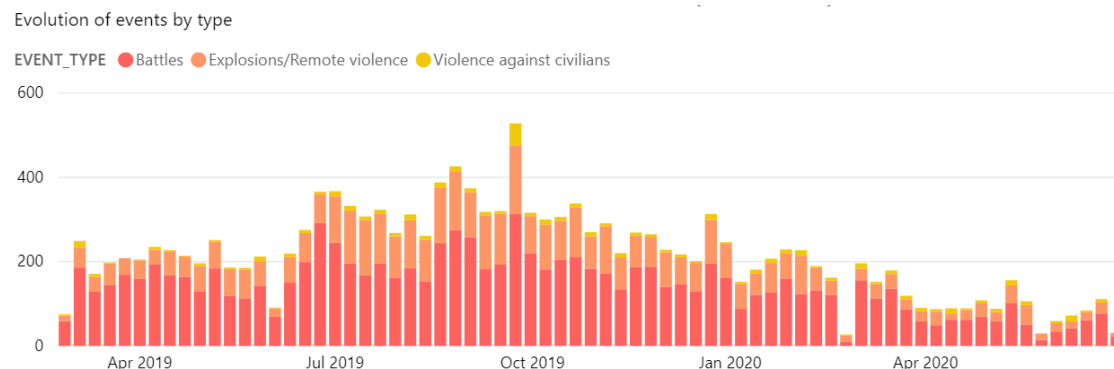


Figure 1. Afghanistan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data¹⁷⁶

According to several UN reports, issued between June 2019 and June 2020, the security situation in Afghanistan remained volatile during the mentioned period.¹⁷⁷ In their annual report released in February 2020, UNAMA indicated that:

‘there were significant fluctuations in violence throughout the year [2019], coinciding with gains and setbacks made during negotiations between the Taliban and the United States of America in Doha. The first half of the year was characterized by an intense campaign of airstrikes by international military forces and search operations by Afghan forces, particularly by the National Directorate of Security Special Forces.’¹⁷⁸

On 29 February 2020, the US and the Taliban signed an agreement for bringing peace to Afghanistan.¹⁷⁹ After signing the deal, the Taliban almost immediately resumed¹⁸⁰ and intensified attacks against ANDSF.¹⁸¹ The group carried out more than 4 500 attacks in 45 days across Afghanistan.¹⁸² According

¹⁷⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the international peace and security, A/73/902–S/2019/493, 14 June 2019, [url](#); UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the international peace and security, A/74/348–S/2019/703, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 5; UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the international peace and security, A/74/582–S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 5; UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the international peace and security, A/74/753–S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 5; UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the international peace and security, A/74/897–S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁷⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-6

¹⁷⁹ BBC, Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18-year war, 29 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the international peace and security, A/74/897–S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁸¹ OFS, Lead inspector general report to the United States Congress, 19 May 2020, [url](#), p. 11; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁸² Reuters, Taliban step up attacks on Afghan forces since signing U.S. deal: data, 1 May 2020, [url](#); 1TV News, Taliban mounted more than 4,500 attacks in 45 days since signing US deal: report, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

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 forces¹⁸³, with sources reporting over 76 attacks in 24 provinces within a week of signing the agreement.¹⁸⁴ The US also resumed 'defensive' air strikes¹⁸⁵, the first of which came five days after the deal.¹⁸⁶ 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 2020.¹⁸⁷

As indicated by the UN Security Council, on 19 March 2020, the Afghan acting Minister of Defence announced an 'active defence posture' in response to the Taliban attacks. 'The day after high-profile attacks 'high-profile attacks on 12 May targeting a hospital in Kabul and a funeral in Nangarhar, Mr Ghani announced that the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces would return to an "offensive posture", with a resumption of operations against the Taliban.'¹⁸⁸

Between 24-26 May 2020, a three-day ceasefire was declared between the Taliban and the government on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr (Islamic holiday).¹⁸⁹ After the brief ceasefire, sources cited by Long War Journal (LWJ) indicated that the Taliban increased their attacks again in June 2020, stepping up assaults on government forces.¹⁹⁰ Tolonews cited the Afghan government claiming 'the Taliban initiated on average 30 attacks on the Afghan security forces each day after the Eid-ul-Fitr ceasefire.'¹⁹¹ Within the first week of June, according to the MoI, 222 attacks were carried out in 29 provinces by the Taliban.¹⁹² In June 2020, Tolonews quoted Afghan officials stating that ANDSF and the Taliban were fighting each other in Takhar, Jawzjan, Paktia, Helmand, Khost, Ghor, Kunduz, Badghis, Kandahar, Samangan, Faryab, Ghazni, Logar, Herat and Badakhshan provinces of Afghanistan.¹⁹³ Widespread fighting between the ANSF and AGEs over the control of the Afghan highways was also reported in June 2020. The source indicated that as a result of [continued] fighting between the Taliban and AGEs, insecurity has significantly increased on the highways, including on the Kabul-Logar-Paktia, Kabul-Baghlan, Baghlan-Kunduz, Pul-e Khumri-Samangan, Kabul -Jalalabad and Kabul-Kandahar highways.¹⁹⁴

1.3.1 Armed clashes and assaults

In 2019, UNAMA observed the lowest number of civilian casualties caused by ground engagements since 2013. During the period between 1 January to 31 December 2019, ground engagements in Afghanistan reportedly caused 3 057 civilian casualties, including 763 killed and 2 294 injured, which represents 10 % decrease compare to 2018. However, ground engagement remained the second leading cause of civilian casualties after suicide and non-suicide IEDs attacks, which represents 29 % of all attacks.¹⁹⁵ During the first six months of 2020, between 1 January to 30 June 2020, ground

¹⁸³ Reuters, Taliban Militants Kill Afghan Regional Police Chief in Latest Attack, in RFE/RL/Gandhara 8 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴ NYT, 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](#)

¹⁸⁵ Military Times, US resumes airstrikes against Taliban to halt attack on Afghan forces, 4 March 2020, [url](#); See also: Reuters, U.S. Forces conduct airstrikes on Taliban in Afghanistan, 5 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ Military Times, US resumes airstrikes against Taliban to halt attack on Afghan forces, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ AFP, Bomb Blamed on Taliban Kills 11 Pro-govt Afghan Militiamen, in RFE/RL/Gandhara, 6 June 2020, [url](#); AFP, Attack blamed on Taliban kills seven Afghan policemen, in New International, 14 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the international peace and security, A/74/897-S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁸⁹ Gandhara, Afghanistan's mass release of Taliban prisoners revives peace process, but seen as "big gamble", 28 May 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghans sides agree to rare cease-fire during Eid al-Fitr, 24 May 2020, [url](#); BBC, Afghanistan: Taliban announce three-day Eid ceasefire with government, 24 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ Roggio, B., Taliban ramps up attacks after ending unilateral ceasefire, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹¹ Tolonews, After ceasefire, Taliban average "30 attacks per day": sources, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹² Tolonews, 171 Govt forces killed in a week in Taliban attacks: officials, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹³ Tolonews, ANDSF fighting Taliban in 15 provinces amid peace efforts, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ Tolonews, Fierce widespread fighting surges to control highways, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 68

engagements remained the leading cause of civilian casualties, which represented 35 % of total civilian casualties (1 195 civilians casualties including 336 deaths and 859 injured).¹⁹⁶

During the last quarter of 2019, Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) carried out 8 204 attacks in Afghanistan.¹⁹⁷ In May, June and July 2020, several armed clashes took place between the Afghan government forces and AGEs, for example in Kunduz¹⁹⁸, Paktia and Paktika¹⁹⁹, Ghor²⁰⁰, Khost²⁰¹, Kapisa²⁰², Kandahar²⁰³, Kapisa²⁰⁴ and Laghman.²⁰⁵

1.3.2 Improvised Explosive Devices

Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are unconventional explosive weapons that can take any form and can be activated in different ways, targeting soldiers and civilians alike.²⁰⁶ IEDs can be operated by the victim (Victim Operated IEDs) or by the attacker (Command-Operated IEDs). Command-Operated IEDs are radio or remote-controlled allowing operators to detonate a pre-placed device at a specific time. Victim-Operated IEDs on the other hand detonate when a person or vehicle triggers the initiator or switch (pressure plate or pressure release mechanism, trip wire or another device). Another category is suicide IEDs where either the attacker wears an explosive vest or belt or a vehicle is rigged with explosives by a driver or passenger inside.²⁰⁷

Although pressure plate IEDs are typically used by AGEs to target security forces, they are planted on public roads routinely used by civilians. Accordingly, their use is inherently indiscriminate as the 'effects cannot be directed against a specific target.'²⁰⁸

UNAMA indicated a surge in harm to civilians from non-suicide IED attacks during the period from 1 January to 31 December 2019, which caused 2 258 civilian casualties including 507 deaths and 1 751 injured. Attacks caused by these devices represented a 24 % increase compared to 2018. 22 % of overall civilian casualties were caused by Non-suicide IEDs, which is more than suicide attacks, including complex attacks as the second leading cause of civilian casualties behind ground engagements. The Taliban and Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) reportedly increased their non-suicide IEDs attacks in 2019. 'Civilian casualties attributed to the Taliban from this tactic increased by 21 % whereas those attributed to ISKP increased by 183 %'. Magnetic IEDs and remote controlled-IED attacks reportedly increased in 2019, which caused 48 % and 38 % more civilian casualties compared to 2018. In 2019, civilian casualties including 275 deaths and 375 injured were reportedly caused by pressure-plate IEDs, which is 14 % decrease compared to 2018. 96 % of these casualties were attributed to the Taliban, which represented 265 deaths and 356 injured.²⁰⁹

According to UNAMA, during the period of 1 January to 30 June 2020, IEDs attacks were the leading cause of the civilian casualties by AGEs, which resulted in 688 civilian casualties including 217 deaths and 471 injured. The widespread use of pressure-plate IEDs (operating as improvised anti-personal

¹⁹⁶ UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁹⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 68; OFS, Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 1 October – 31 December 2019, 5 February 2020, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁹⁸ Tolonews, "3 police, 5 Taliban killed" in Kunduz clashes, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ TKG, Clashes in Paktia and Paktika leave 35 Taliban fighters killed, 17 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁰ Ariana News, Nine police killed in Ghor, Kandahar clashes, 13 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰¹ Afghanistan Times, Armed conflict in Khost leaves eight dead, 13 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰² Khaama Press, Taliban militants suffer heavy casualties in Kapisa clashes, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰³ Ariana News, Taliban killed, wounded in Kandahar clashes, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ Ariana News, Clashes underway in Kapisa, 16 Taliban militants killed, 19 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁵ Khaama Press, 22 Taliban militants killed, wounded on Kabul-Jalalabad highway, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ NATO, Improvised explosive devices, 12 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices, October 2018, [url](#), p. 10

²⁰⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices, October 2018, [url](#), p. 8

²⁰⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 41-42

mines) by the Taliban caused around half of the civilian casualties (45 %) from IEDs that represented 50 % increase compared to the same period in 2019.²¹⁰

On 31 July 2019, a bus hit an IED on the highway between Kandahar and Herat, killing at least 34 civilians and wounding other 17²¹¹, and on 4 January 2020, one civilian was killed when an IED attached to a vehicle exploded in 10th Police District of Mazar-e Sharif City, in Balkh province.²¹² Recently, on 8 July 2020, a police vehicle was hit by an IED in Golaye (square) Jamhuriat in PD 11 of Kabul City.²¹³

In February 2020, the Taliban published a magazine titled *Haqiqat* (fact), in which it was indicated that an IED could be planted by the Taliban fighters on a public road to target the enemy as long as civilians are informed in advance.²¹⁴

1.3.3 High-profile attacks

During the period from 1 January to 31 December 2019, UNAMA documented 2 832 civilian casualties including 817 deaths and 2 015 injured, which involved deliberate targeting of civilians, with a 31 % decrease compared to 2018.²¹⁵

According to UNAMA, in 2019, suicide attacks, including complex attacks by the Taliban caused 1 499 civilian casualties, including 165 deaths and 1 334 injured, which represents 133 % increase compared to 2018.²¹⁶ During the period of 1 January to 30 June 2020, UNAMA documented 342 civilian deaths and 428 injured caused by deliberate attacks on civilians, which represented 21 % of the overall civilian casualties.²¹⁷

Recent security incidents with high-profile attacks in 2019 and 2020 include:

- On 13 June 2019, a suicide attacker, which targeted a police vehicle in Police District 6 of Jalalabad City, killed five civilians and four local police officers, and wounded at least 12 people, including three children and three police officers.²¹⁸
- On 12 July 2019, nine people were killed, and twelve others wounded after a child was used to carry out a suicide attack in a wedding party in Pachiragam district of Nangarhar province. Reportedly, a pro-government militia commander was the target and ISKP group claimed the responsibility for the attack.²¹⁹
- On 27 July 2019, two civilians were killed including a woman and 30 others were wounded when a motorcycle bomb targeted a Khost Provincial Force convoy in the eastern part of Khost City.²²⁰
- On 1 September 2019, a suicide bomber targeted a security news conference in Kunduz City killing 10 security forces, including the Kunduz police spokesman and five civilians. According to the source, the mentioned conference was organised following a Taliban's attack on Kunduz City from multiple directions, killing 10 security forces.²²¹

²¹⁰ UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²¹¹ Al Jazeera, Dozens of civilians killed as the bus hit a roadside bomb, 31 July 2019, [url](#)

²¹² Khaama Press, IED claims one death in northern Balkh province, 4 January 2020, [url](#)

²¹³ Tolonews, Blast hits police vehicle in Kabul city, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴ Voice of Jihad, *مجله حقیقت* [informal translation: 'Haqiqat (truth) magazine'], 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 39

²¹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 44

²¹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 38

²¹⁷ UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 4 and 12

²¹⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁹ BBC, Afghanistan war: child used in suicide attack, 12 July 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-1 Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](#)

²²¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

- On 11 September 2019, a religious scholar, Mullah Mohammad Agha, who owned a *madrasa* (koranic school) in the Bakhto-Tangi village of Shawalikot district in Kandahar province, was killed by the Taliban.²²²
- On 18 October 2019, sixty-two people have been killed and dozens injured by a bomb explosion during Friday prayers at a mosque in Haska Mina district of Nangarhar province.²²³ Another source also reported on the incident indicating that a suicide bomber killed at least 73 civilians including the only doctor of Jowdara village, his two brothers and his two sons, and two of the mentioned village's teachers.²²⁴
- On 25 October 2019, two civilians and three members of the National Directorate of Security Special forces unit were killed when a suicide bomber targeted a convoy of the agency in Jalalabad City. The source also noted that six agents and 15 civilians were wounded in the incident.²²⁵
- On 7 November 2019, Taliban fighters shot and killed four members of the Paktia province judiciary, including three judges and a staff member of the secretariat of the Paktia court, in Mohammad Agha district, while the victims were on their way to Kabul in a private vehicle. During the year 2019, UNAMA documented 17 deliberate attacks against members of the judiciary causing 20 deaths and 11 injured.²²⁶
- On 5 March 2020, religious scholar Maulvi Noor Pacha Hammad was killed in PD5 of Kabul City.²²⁷
- On 22 June 2020, five employees of the Attorney General's Office (AGO), who were also part of the US-Taliban agreement implementation team, were killed in Deh Sabz area of Kabul province.²²⁸
- On 27 June 2020, two employees of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), Fatima Khalil, a donor liaison officer, and Jawid Folad, a driver, were killed after their vehicle was hit by an IED in Butkhak square in Police District 12 of Kabul.²²⁹

1.3.4 Targeted killings and conflict-related abduction

During the period of 1 January to 31 December 2019, UNAMA documented 218 incidents of conflict-related abductions that affected 1 006 civilians and caused 50 civilian deaths and five injured. During the aforementioned period, there was a 46 % decrease in the number of civilians abducted compared to 2018, however, the number of abductees who were killed remained at the same level as in 2018. All the abduction-related incidents were attributed to the AGEs including majority to the Taliban – with the exception of three abduction incidents, which were attributed to pro-government armed groups. These incidents included the abduction of humanitarian workers, deminers, and healthcare workers.²³⁰ During the first quarter of 2020, UNAMA reported 'an increase in civilian deaths from intentional targeting of civilians' compared to 2019.²³¹

During the period of 1 January to 30 June 2020, UNAMA documented 28 verified incidents of abduction of civilians that caused 68 civilian casualties including 40 deaths and 28 injured, which represented a five-time increase compared to the same period in 2019. UNAMA expressed its worry

²²² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

²²³ BBC, Afghanistan mosque bombing kills 62 people, 18 October 2019, [url](#)

²²⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²²⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²²⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 44

²²⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Religious scholar shot dead in Kabul, 21 March 2020, [url](#)

²²⁸ 1TV, Five AGO killed in an attack on Kabul outskirts, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

²²⁹ AIHRC, Killing of two AIHRC employees in Kabul, 27 June 2020, [url](#)

²³⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 49

²³¹ UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, first quarter report: 1 January – 31 March 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 5

about the increase in abductions of civilians by the Taliban that resulted in ill treatment and summary executions.²³²

During the second half of 2019, several incidents of targeted killings and conflict-related abductions were carried out across the country, mainly by the Taliban, including the killing of a teacher, students, an *Imam* (religious scholar), protestors, government employees, members of the ANDSF and their relatives, a pro-government village elder, a human rights activist, civilians accused of cooperating with the government or NATO forces.²³³

Recent incidents of targeted killings and conflict-related abduction include:

- On 2 January 2020, an employee of Radio Samoun was killed in Lashkargah City of Helmand province.²³⁴ Following the incident, the body of the victim was found and it was discovered he had been tortured and shot several times.²³⁵
- On 1 February 2020, Kabul Now (local media) reported that women, including young girls, were exchanged for weapons in parts of Ghor province, and the widespread use of weapons has increasingly caused deaths amongst women in the province.²³⁶
- On 18 February 2020, Abdul Rahim Azimi, head of primary court in Injil district in Herat province was killed in an ambush by unknown gunmen in Shaidaee village of Injil district.²³⁷
- On 3 March 2020, the Taliban shot and killed a former soldier who was travelling by public transportation in the village of Takht-e Pol in Obe district in Herat province.²³⁸
- On 4 March 2020, the Taliban killed a civilian accused of theft in the village of Mosaferan in Obe district in Herat province.²³⁹
- On 5 March 2020, a tribal leader was reportedly killed by the Taliban in Toti-Chi village of Golran district in Herat province.²⁴⁰
- On 6 March 2020, the Taliban reportedly kidnapped and later killed one civilian in the village of Daryaban in Obe district in Herat province.²⁴¹
- On 7 April 2020, the Taliban kidnapped and killed an Afghan territorial army member on the way in the village of Qarchaghi of Qadis district in Badghis province.²⁴²
- On 9 April 2020, the Taliban kidnapped and killed five employees of the Afghanistan central bank on the way between Islam Qala border pass and Herat City.²⁴³
- On 10 April 2020, the imam and sermon of Hazrat Ali mosque in Farah province was killed by unknown gunmen.²⁴⁴

²³² UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 12

²³³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, [url](#); Reportedly, Taliban shot killed three residents of Samangan, 27 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#); AIHRC, on the martyr of the Acting Head of Ghor Provincial Office of the AIHRC, 5 September 2019, [url](#); HRW, Taliban linked to murder of Afghan rights defender, 6 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](#); Reportedly, Taliban shot killed three residents of Samangan, 27 August 2019, [url](#); HRW, Taliban linked to murder of Afghan rights defender, 6 September 2019, [url](#); Reportedly, Taliban shot killed three residents of Samangan, 27 August 2019, [url](#); HRW, Taliban linked to murder of Afghan rights defender, 6 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

²³⁴ Khaama Press, Media staff killed in Afghanistan's southern province Helmand, 2 January 2020, [url](#); 1 TV, Afghan media worker killed in Afghanistan, 2 January 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan war casualty report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

²³⁵ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

²³⁶ Kabul Now, Women exchanged for weapons in parts of Ghor, 1 February 2020, [url](#)

²³⁷ Tolonews, Unknown gunmen kill head of a primary court in Herat, 18 February 2020, [url](#)

²³⁸ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

²³⁹ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁰ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁴² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report, April 2020, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁴³ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: April 2020, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, religious scholar gunned down in Farah, 10 April 2020, [url](#)

- On 15 April 2020, four youths were reportedly wounded in Gharghai district in Laghman province after the Taliban opened fire on individuals playing cricket.²⁴⁵
- On 16 April 2020, the Taliban fighters shot and killed an Afghan police officer on his way to work in the village of Tagob-Esmail in Qala-i Naw City in Badghis province.²⁴⁶
- On 27 April 2020, a Taliban sniper shot and killed two police officers and wounded another in the village of Mirza-Ali in Qadis district in Badghis province. The police were targeted when they were bringing water from a well.²⁴⁷
- On 30 April 2020, unknown gunmen reportedly killed a provincial court judge in Police District 12 of Herat City.²⁴⁸
- On 7 May 2020, the Taliban reportedly destroyed, in an attack in Kamanj area, a bridge on Harirod river that connected Herat with Ghor provinces. The source also indicating that the Taliban set fire to a telecommunication tower in Kamanj belonging to Etisalat telecom firm and cited Qurban Ali stating ‘the Taliban have warned all telecom companies in Ghor province they will destroy their telecom towers unless they shut them off at night.’²⁴⁹
- On 6 June 2020, the Taliban kidnapped and killed a civilian man in Shaidan village in Dow Lina district in Ghor province.²⁵⁰
- On 1 July 2020, Kabul Now cited Muhibullah Muhib, spokesman for Farah police chief, stating that a schoolteacher named Hamidullah Rahmani was killed by the Taliban in Dehak village of Farah City.²⁵¹

1.3.5 Aerial attacks and bombings

According to UNAMA, 219 air strikes were carried out by pro-government forces in 2019, which caused 1 045 civilian casualties, including 700 deaths and 345 injured, with a 3 % increase compared to 2018. The source also indicated that 10 % of the overall casualties in 2019 were caused by the air strikes.²⁵² While SIGAR cited RS (Resolute Support) indicating that 2 % of the civilian casualties were caused by air strikes in 2019.²⁵³

According to UNAMA, during the first half of 2020, civilian casualties caused by air strikes represented 9 % of the overall civilian casualties. UNAMA indicated that there has been 43 % decrease in overall civilian casualties by air strikes during the mentioned period, due to an important reduction in activity by the international military forces following the signing of the US-Taliban agreement in February 2020.²⁵⁴ At the same time, UNAMA expressed concerns over the increase in civilian casualties caused by Afghan Air Force, noting that during the first six months of 2020 the number of civilian casualties caused by Afghan Force’s airstrikes tripled compared to the same period in 2019. More than half of civilian casualties caused by all pro-government forces’ airstrikes during this period were women and children, with 65 % of civilian casualties from airstrikes caused by Afghan Air Force alone. Numerous airstrikes by Afghan Air Force hit residential buildings, for examples: on 20 May in Maradyan district of Jawzjan province, two airstrikes hit two homes killing six civilians, including three children, one woman and two men; on the same day in Khan Abad district of Kunduz province, an airstrike hit a home killing three civilians (two women and one man) and injuring five (four children and one woman);

²⁴⁵ Khaama Press, Taliban militants open fire on youths who were playing cricket, 15 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report, April 2020, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report, April 2020, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁸ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: April 2020, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁹ Salaam Times, An insult to Islam: Taliban attack in Ghor forces hundreds to flee during Ramadan, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁵¹ Kabul Now, School teacher shot dead by Taliban in Farah province, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁵² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 59

²⁵³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 68

²⁵⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 4 and 16

on 24 June in Balkh district of Balkh province, an airstrike hit a home killing four civilians (two children, one woman and one man) and injuring five others, including two children.²⁵⁵

On 6 May 2019, between 30 and 45 civilian workers were killed, including children, in clashes and air strikes by foreign troops on drug production factories in Gulistan and Bakwa districts of Farah province.²⁵⁶ On 1 September 2019, 13 civilians were killed in an air strike in retaliation to the Taliban's attack on Gorziwan district of Faryab province.²⁵⁷ During the same period and in the same district of Faryab province, 12 civilians were killed in a US air strike on three residential houses while backing the Afghan forces who were fighting the Taliban in the area.²⁵⁸

1.3.6 Search operations

In February 2020, UNAMA noted:

'search operations are a military tactic used in Afghanistan by Pro-Government Forces to capture or kill persons they believe to be Anti-Government Element targets, usually involving entering and searching homes or other civilian structures, and often carried out at night. Often referred to as "night raids".'²⁵⁹

According to UNAMA search operations, which are also referred as 'night raids' caused 2 % more civilian casualties in 2019 compared to 2018. UNAMA indicated that during the period between 1 January and 31 December 2019, night raids caused 360 civilian casualties, including 278 deaths and 82 injured, mainly by NDS, Khost Protection Force and Paktika-based 'Shaheen Forces'.²⁶⁰ During the first quarter of 2020, UNAMA documented an important decrease in civilian casualties from search operations by ANSF.²⁶¹

On 24 August 2019, one civilian was killed and four others were wounded, including two women and two children when Afghan and foreign forces carried out a night raid in the Babos area of Pul-e Alam district in Logar province.²⁶² Similarly, on 11 August 2019, at least 11 civilians were reportedly killed in a night raid carried out by NDS Special Forces in the Kolalgo area of Zurmat district in Paktia province.²⁶³

1.3.7 Explosive remnants of war

According to UNAMA, Explosive Remnants of War refer to UXO (unexploded ordnance) and AXO (abandoned explosive ordnance). During the period between 1 January and 31 December 2019, UNAMA documented 520 civilian casualties, including 149 deaths and 371 injured caused by explosive remnants of war, with a 6 % increase compared to 2018. UNAMA also indicated that

'children continued to be disproportionately harmed by explosive remnants of war which represent a significant contributing factor to child disability. In 2019, children accounted for almost 78 per cent of all civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war, with 403 child casualties (113 killed and 290 injured) including 360 boys. Children who survive encounters

²⁵⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 16

²⁵⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, dozens of civilians, forces killed in Farah, 6 May 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, protection of civilians in armed conflicts, special report: airstrike on alleged drug-process facilities, 5 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 91

²⁶⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 64

²⁶¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict, first quarter report: 1 January – 31 March 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²⁶² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁶³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 9-15, 15 August 2019, [url](#)

with explosive remnants of war live with lasting detrimental impact on their quality of life due to loss of limbs or eyesight, other serious injuries, and psychological trauma.²⁶⁴

During the period of 1 January to 30 June 2020, explosive remnants of war caused 6 % of the overall civilian casualties. UNAMA documented verified 218 civilian casualties including 59 deaths and 159 injured ('80 % of whom were children') from explosive remnants of war during the mentioned period.²⁶⁵

In February 2020, Tolonews cited Abdul Jalil Sediqq, head of Mine Action Coordination, stating that in 2019 in Afghanistan 'more than 110 civilians have been killed and at least 130 others have been wounded over the past year due to mines and other explosive materials originating from the Soviet invasion-era.'²⁶⁶ On 9 June 2019, one child was reportedly killed, and seven others were wounded when an unexploded mortar shell, which children were playing with, exploded in the Charada area of Wayez district in Ghazni province.²⁶⁷ In a similar incident in Laghman province, on 15 April 2019, seven children aged under 15 were killed while playing with unexploded mortar shell.²⁶⁸

1.4 Impact of the violence on the civilian population

1.4.1 Civilian casualties

Year	Civilians killed	Civilians injured	Total civilian casualties
2020 1Q – 2Q	1 282	2 176	3 458
2019	3 403	6 989	10 392
2018	3 804	7 189	10 993
2017	3 440	7 019	10 459
2016	3 527	7 925	11 452
2015	3 565	7 470	11 035
2014	3 701	6 834	10 535
2013	2 969	5 669	8 638
2012	2 769	4 821	7 590
2011	3 133	4 709	7 842
2010	2 794	4 368	7 162
2009	2 412	3 557	5 969

Figure 2. Source: UNAMA Protection of civilians in armed conflict

In 2019, UNAMA documented 10 392 civilian casualties, including 3 403 deaths and 6 989 injured as a result of the armed conflict, with a 5 % decrease compared to 2018. This decrease was due to the reduction in civilian casualties caused by the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), while civilian casualties caused by other actors increased, notably by the Taliban and International military forces.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 30-3; 89

²⁶⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 4; 7

²⁶⁶ Tolonews, 100 of civilian casualties caused by unexploded ordnance in 2019, 20 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁸ Salaam Times, Unexploded mortar shell kills 7 children in Laghman 15 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 5

The third quarter of 2019 was ‘particularly violent’, registering ‘the highest number of civilian casualties of any quarter since UNAMA began systematic documentation in 2009’. The main factors of such as a spike in civilian casualties were suicide and non-suicide IED attacks by AGEs, primarily by the Taliban, along with election-related violence. In the first half of 2019, the number of civilian casualties attributed to pro-government forces was higher than the one caused by AGEs; this is ‘a trend that UNAMA had not documented before 2019’.²⁷⁰

According to UNAMA, in 2019, Anti-Government Elements (AGEs), were responsible for 62 % of civilian casualties including 47 % caused by the Taliban and 12 % by ISKP and the remaining 3 % to undetermined and other AGEs. IEDs used by AGEs in both suicide and non-suicide attacks remained the leading cause of civilian casualties in 2019 at 42 %.²⁷¹ UNAMA indicated that 10 % of the overall civilian casualties in 2019 were caused by air strikes, with majority (72 %) attributed to international military forces. According to UNAMA, 28 % of the civilian casualties in 2019 were caused by pro-government forces, including 16 % by ANSF, around 8 % by international military forces, nearly 2 % by pro-government armed groups, and just under 3 % by undetermined or multiple pro-government forces.²⁷²

Pro-government armed groups caused 184 civilian casualties including 102 deaths and 82 injured in 57 incidents and were responsible for seven conflict-related abductions throughout 2019. This represents a 2 % increase in civilian casualties caused by pro-government armed groups compared to 2018 and doubled compared to 2017. Civilian casualties caused by pro-government armed groups occurred mainly in the context of ground engagements (40 %) and search operations (34 %). The majority of these casualties were caused by Khost Protection Force and Shaheen Forces in Paktia, Paktika and Ghazni provinces, while the remaining civilian casualties mainly occurred in Takhar and Baghlan provinces.²⁷³ In 2019, UNAMA verified 12 incidents involving 25 civilian deaths as a result of operations by Khost Protection Force. This shows a significant decrease compared to 2018.²⁷⁴ The majority of civilian deaths attributed to the Khost Protection Force were caused by intentional shooting, mostly during search operations.²⁷⁵ In 2019, UNAMA attributed 559 civilian casualties including 227 deaths and 786 injured to international military forces.²⁷⁶

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 2019²⁷⁷; of those, 6 447 civilian casualties (1 668 killed and 4 779 injured) were attributed to AGEs²⁷⁸, in particular 76 % to the Taliban, 19 % to ISIL-KP, and 5 % to undetermined AGEs.²⁷⁹

As a reaction to the figures released by UNAMA in their 2020 annual report, the Taliban published a statement on their official website, Voice of Jihad, rejecting the UNAMA reporting as ‘completely discriminatory’. Citing data by their special commission mandated to collect, register and prevent civilian casualties, the Taliban claimed that 83 % of all civilian casualties in 2019 were caused by the US and Afghan government forces, contrary to what stated by UNAMA.²⁸⁰

SIGAR cited RS (Resolute Support) reporting 1 268 civilian casualties in Afghanistan during the first quarter (1 January – 31 March) of 2020, with 32 % decrease compared to the last quarter (1 October -

²⁷⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-6

²⁷¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 6

²⁷² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 8, 10

²⁷³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 56

²⁷⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 57-58

²⁷⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 57

²⁷⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 53

²⁷⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-6

²⁷⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 32

²⁷⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 33

²⁸⁰ Voice of Jihad, Reaction by spokesman of Islamic Emirate towards civilian casualty report by UNAMA, 23 February 2020, [url](#)

31 December) of 2019. RS reportedly attributed 88 % of the civilian casualties to AGEs, including the Taliban that caused 37 %, ISKP 10 %, and unknown insurgents 41 %. According to SIGAR RS attributed another 7 % to pro-government forces, including 6 % to ANDSF and 1 % to International military forces, and 5 % to other or unknown forces.²⁸¹

Between 25 and 29 June 2020, AIHRC reported several security incidents in different provinces of Afghanistan that resulted in civilian casualties including the recent attack [29 June 2020] in old Bazar of Sangin district in Helmand province where in a rocket attack 27 civilians have been killed and 35 injured.²⁸²

During the first quarter of 2020, the conflict in Afghanistan continued to be one of the deadliest in the world for civilians.²⁸³ Between 1 January and 30 June 2020, UNAMA documented 3 458 civilian casualties including 1 282 deaths and 2 176 injured, with a 13 % decrease compared to the same period in 2019.²⁸⁴ This overall decrease was due to the significant drop in civilian casualties caused by air strikes by international forces and reduced activity by ISKP.²⁸⁵ At the same time, during the first quarter of 2020, UNAMA stated to be 'gravely concerned with the acceleration in violence observed in March 2020, mainly by the Taliban against Afghan national security forces, and the consequent increase in the number of civilian casualties and harm caused, particularly in the northern and north-eastern regions'.²⁸⁶ According to SIGAR, during the second quarter of 2020, civilian casualties increased by nearly 60 % compared to the first quarter of the year, and by 18 % compared to the same period in 2019.²⁸⁷

Following the signing of the US-Taliban agreement in Doha, various sources reported a spike in violence and civilian casualties.²⁸⁸ Despite periods of reduction in violence, during the first six months of 2020, violence has continued, with civilians bearing the brunt.²⁸⁹ A report by the co-Director of the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), Kate Clark, 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; while elsewhere many civilians have seen renewed attacks by the Taliban, among fear of 'possible intensifying conflict'.²⁹⁰

UNAMA reported that, during the first six months of 2020, pro-government forces were responsible for 28 % of all civilian casualties and remained responsible for more child deaths than AGEs.²⁹¹ International military forces were responsible for 3 % of overall civilian casualties.²⁹² During the same period, AGEs continued to be responsible for the majority of civilian casualties, with a total 58 %; of which 43 % were attributed to the Taliban, 9 % to ISIL-KP and 6 % to undetermined AGEs.²⁹³

²⁸¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

²⁸² AIHRC, Civilian casualties in the cattle market in Sangin district of Helmand province and in some other provinces of the country, 30 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁸³ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, first quarter report: 1 January – 31 March 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁸⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 3

²⁸⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report: 1 January - 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-4

²⁸⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, First Quarter Report: 1 January- 31 March 2020, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 3

²⁸⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 65

²⁸⁸ AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Afghanistan's civilian casualties rise following U.S.-Taliban peace deal, 19 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan Deaths Pile Up in Uncertainty Over U.S. Deal With Taliban, 27 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁹ UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report: 1 January - 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 3

²⁹⁰ 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](#)

²⁹¹ UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

²⁹² UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 7

²⁹³ UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report: 1 January - 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 8

Commenting on this latest reporting by UNAMA during an interview with EASO, on 27 July 2020, co-Director at the AAN Kate Clark noted that ‘government forces do not always discriminate in their targeting, as seen in the recent UNAMA Protection of Civilians midyear report which detailed civilian casualties resulting from indirect fire and air strikes. The ANSF have never taken civilian casualties seriously. They have never done proper investigations and compensation. There is rarely any disciplinary action.’²⁹⁴

1.4.2 State ability to secure law and order

More detailed information on the state structure and governance in Afghanistan, including on state judiciary, its capacity, integrity, effectiveness in prosecution can be found in [EASO COI Report Afghanistan, State Structure and Security Forces, August 2020](#).

The World Justice Project’s (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2020 ranks Afghanistan 122 out of 128 countries²⁹⁵, allocating it to the last place in the ‘order and security’ factor.²⁹⁶ In its report for the first quarter of 2020, UNAMA noted ‘an increase in civilian deaths from intentional targeting of civilians’, as compared to 2019, referring particularly to March 2020 mass-shooting incidents by ISKP and targeted killings, abductions, and planting of IEDs by the Taliban.²⁹⁷ Commenting on the deaths of at least 23 civilians during a market festival in Sangin district, Helmand province, on 29 June 2020, the spokesman for the National Security Council (NSC) said that 24 civilians were killed or injured daily starting from 22 February 2020.²⁹⁸ The Asia Foundation 2019 survey revealed that 74.5 % of Afghans often feared for their personal safety, which is a 3 % increase from 2018 and the highest rate since the start of the survey.²⁹⁹

UNAMA reported that judiciary sector employees remained targeted in 2019, as 13 judges, three judicial staff, and 19 prosecutors were killed during the year, noting that ‘no case of an attack against the judiciary was ever sufficiently investigated to indict the crime.’ In the situation of ‘poor security and direct threats to judges’, female judges, in particular, were reported to feel reluctant ‘to work in remote districts.’³⁰⁰ According to the Government and Media Joint Committee, referred to by the UN Secretary General, 116 cases of violence against journalists and media workers, in which 10 persons were killed and 21 injured, were reported in 2019.³⁰¹ For the period from 1 January to 30 June 2020, UNAMA reported on attacks by AGEs on religious leaders (18 incidents), healthcare personnel (13 incidents), judiciary members (11 incidents), civil society activists (9 incidents), NGOs’ staff (8 incidents), and journalists (3 incidents).³⁰² As reported in local media, the recent cases of violence toward media workers, human rights defenders, including AIHRC, and NGO employees comprise—but are not limited to—assassinations by unknown armed men³⁰³, IED blasts targeting vehicles³⁰⁴, and killing of family members.³⁰⁵ In February 2020, as reported by the UN General Assembly Security

²⁹⁴ Clark K., AAN, online video interview with EASO, 27 July 2020

²⁹⁵ WJP, Rule of Law Index 2020, n.d., [url](#), p. 6

²⁹⁶ WJP, Rule of Law Index 2020, n.d., [url](#), pp. 26, 33

²⁹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, First Quarter Report, April 2020, [url](#), pp. 4-5

²⁹⁸ Tolonews, ‘24 Civilians Killed or Wounded Everyday’: NSC, 30 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁹ Asia Foundation (The), Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 57, 59

³⁰⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan’s Fight Against Corruption Crucial for Peace and Prosperity, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 40-41

³⁰¹ UN General Assembly Security Council, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General [A/74/753-S/220/210], 17 March 2020, [url](#), pp. 9-10

³⁰² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, [url](#), p. 10

³⁰³ Tolonews, Wahid Muzhda, Political Analyst, Assassinated In Kabul, 20 November 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Seven Members Of One Family Murdered In Kabul, 27 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁴ Tolonews, Journalist, Studio Technician Killed in Kabul Blast, 6 Wounded, 30 May 2020 (edited 31 May 2020), [url](#); Tolonews, Families of Slain Human Rights Workers Call for Justice, [url](#); Tolonews, Two Human Rights Workers Killed in Kabul, 27 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁵ Tolonews, Families of Slain Human Rights Workers Call for Justice, [url](#); Tolonews, Two Human Rights Workers Killed in Kabul, 27 June 2020, [url](#)

Council, the Afghan cabinet endorsed the regulation prepared by the Government and Media Joint Committee to protect journalists and media workers. The Council reported also on the arrest of eight out of 18 persons suspected in threatening AIHRC human rights defenders involved ‘in researching of the practice of *bacha bazi*’ in Logar province.³⁰⁶

Following the explosion in a Sikh temple in Shorbazar area of Kabul in March 2020, ‘Sikhs and Hindus’ accused the government of negligence, as reported by local media.³⁰⁷ Similarly, the explosion in Wazir Akbar Khan mosque in Kabul at the beginning of June 2020 was reported to cause ‘strong anger and a public outcry over the fragile security situation in the country’.³⁰⁸

During 2019 and up till the first months of 2020, the city of Kabul faced an increase in criminality³⁰⁹, which started occurring even in relatively safe central areas³¹⁰, turning the city into ‘one of the most dangerous places for businessmen, foreigners, local officials and ordinary people’.³¹¹ As noted by Foschini, the rise in criminal incidents ‘reflects a geographic expansion as well as new forms of criminality, including more violent crime and an increase in drug related crimes’.³¹² Crime cases reported by media comprised kidnapping of adults³¹³ and children³¹⁴, robberies and burglaries³¹⁵, murder³¹⁶, gunfire³¹⁷, and accidental killing during a gunfight between criminal groups.³¹⁸ Foschini noted on extortion schemes (*bajgiri*) practiced by organised crime groups, which target ‘a range of businesses from petrol stations to factories’ and the ability of crime groups to recruit new members because of unemployment or underemployment among the young men.³¹⁹ According to Foschini, Kabul police faced corruption and a lack of staff to investigate criminal cases. Moreover, Foschini reported on tight relations between criminals and the police in some of the neighbourhoods, which prevented legal prosecution.³²⁰

Besides Kabul, the cities of Jalalabad, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif were reported to face the ‘similar spikes in criminal activity.’ Kunduz was reported to face a deterioration in security situation ‘due to a lack of governance, a resurgent Taliban and an increasing crime rate’, while police were reported to be unable to stop robberies and extortions in the city.³²¹ Following a land-related conflict, the local media reported that residents of Balkh province ‘accuse[d] security organs of their failure to control

³⁰⁶ UN, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General A/74/753–S/220/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 10

³⁰⁷ Tolonews, 25 Killed in Attack at Dharamshala, Sikh Temple in Kabul, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁸ Tolonews, Burial Held for Imam Killed by Blast, Public Outcry Continues, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁹ Foschini, F., Kabul’s Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The roots of today’s underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, last updated on 9 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime? 8 February 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Kabul Residents Call on Security Forces to Crackdown on Crime, 22 February 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁰ Foschini, F., Kabul’s Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal activities and the police response, AAN, 21 February 2020, updated 9 March 2020, [url](#)

³¹¹ Bakhtiari, D., Kabul Accommodate the Richest and the Poorest – Never Feel Secure, Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 22 March 2020, [url](#)

³¹² Foschini, F., Kabul’s Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal activities and the police response, AAN, 21 February 2020, last updated 9 March 2020, [url](#)

³¹³ Ariana News, Kidnapping Gang Arrested in Kabul, Businessman Rescued, 26 December 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁴ Inside Over, Child Kidnapping in Kabul on the Rise, 11 July 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Eight-Year-Old Boy Abducted, Killed in Kabul, 16 March 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁵ Foschini, F., Kabul’s Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal activities and the police response, AAN, 21 February 2020, updated 9 March 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Kabul Residents Call on Security Forces to Crackdown on Crime, 22 February 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Crimes in Kabul’s ‘Most Secure Areas’ Alarm Residents, 24 May 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁶ Tolonews, Seven Members Of One Family Murdered In Kabul, 27 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime? 8 February 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 2 Killed in Kabul Amid Rising Crime in City, 20 March 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁷ Tolonews, Nine Men ‘Mysteriously’ Killed in Kabul, 16 February 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁸ Tolonews, Crimes in Kabul’s ‘Most Secure Areas’ Alarm Residents, 24 May 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁹ Foschini, F., Kabul’s Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal activities and the police response, AAN, 21 February 2020, updated 9 March 2020, [url](#)

³²⁰ NYT, They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime? 8 February 2020, [url](#)

³²¹ Latifi, A. M., Ehsan, E., Surviving Kunduz: Crime and violence swamp neglected Afghan city once hailed as model of governance, The New Arab, 2 August 2019, [url](#)

the situation’.³²² The 2019 Asia Foundation survey founded that 38 % of Afghans named criminals/thieves as ‘a threat to the local area’, which is a 50 % increase compared with 2018.³²³

According to the 2019 Asia Foundation survey, 57.5 % of respondents trusted the Afghan National Army (ANA): 53 % believed that it helped to improve security and 52 % said that was protecting civilians; almost 60 % stated ANA was ‘honest and fair’.³²⁴

1.4.3 Socio-economic conditions

In 2019, the Afghan economy remained largely dependent on international grants³²⁵, which—besides covering nearly half of the government budget—financed around 75 % of total public expenditure and nearly 90 % of security expenditure as of 2019.³²⁶ The country has one of the world’s lowest employment-to-population ratios³²⁷ and 21 % of the country’s working population are considered underemployed.³²⁸ The World Bank characterised 80 % of employment in Afghanistan as ‘vulnerable and insecure’ and consisting of self-employment, day labour or unpaid work.³²⁹ UNICEF estimated the number of children engaged in child labour at 60 000 in 2017³³⁰ and reported that 30 % of children in Afghanistan were engaged in child labour as of 2019.³³¹

In 2019, UNOCHA estimated that over 80 % of Afghans lived on less than the internationally applied poverty line (USD 1.90 per day).³³² Noting that the deterioration in welfare became more widespread across the country, the World Bank reported that rural poverty had consistently higher than urban poverty³³³; as of 2019, 82 % of the rural population was defined as poor.³³⁴ The ongoing conflict and displacement, high levels of unemployment and lack of income, and natural disasters were named by UNOCHA among the key drivers of acute food insecurity.³³⁵ According to the data by the Afghanistan Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI) collected in June 2020 to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the Afghan market, there was a decrease in the demand for food and non-food commodities accessed by JMMI³³⁶, which revealed that in the purchasing power of Afghan households had diminished.³³⁷

The literacy rate was reported to increase to the figures of 43 % for adults and to 65 % for the youth as of 2018³³⁸; however, it remained disproportionately high among girls, particularly in rural areas.³³⁹

According to Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) of 2016-17, which remains the most recent data at the time of the writing, most housing in Afghanistan consisted of irregular, detached, or semi-

³²² Pajhwok Afghan News, Increasing crime incidents worry Balkh dwellers, 26 October 2019, [url](#)

³²³ Asia Foundation (The), Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 18

³²⁴ Asia Foundation (The), Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 18

³²⁵ OECD, Boosting Private Sector Development and Entrepreneurship in Afghanistan, 2019, [url](#), p. 13; World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 30

³²⁶ World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 30

³²⁷ The proportion of a country’s working-age population that is employed, see ILO, Indicator description: Employment-to-population ratio, n.d., [url](#)

³²⁸ World Bank (The), No Household Left Behind : Afghanistan Targeting the Ultra Poor Impact Evaluation, 10 June 2019, [url](#), p. 8

³²⁹ World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update, 28 October 2018, [url](#), p. 29

³³⁰ UNICEF and Samuel Hall, Evaluation of “Improving Street-working Children’s Access to Education and Livelihood Support for their Families” Kabul, Afghanistan, September 2017, [url](#), p. 6

³³¹ UNICEF, Preserving hope in Afghanistan – Protecting Children in the world’s most lethal conflict, December 2019, [url](#), p. 21

³³² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), pp. 9, 16

³³³ World Bank, Hunger before the Drought: Food Insecurity in Afghanistan, 1 June 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³³⁴ World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Building Confidence Amid Uncertainty, June 2019, [url](#), pp. i, 5

³³⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 22

³³⁶ REACH, Afghanistan Joint Monitoring Initiative (JMMI), [url](#), p. 1

³³⁷ REACH, Supporting the humanitarian response to COVID-19 – Updates on Ongoing Research on the Impact of COVID-19 in Crisis-Affected Countries, 4 August 2020, [url](#)

³³⁸ World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, [url](#), p. 26

³³⁹ CEDAW, Concluding observation on the third periodic report of Afghanistan [CEDAW/C/AFG/CO/3], 10 March 2020, [url](#), p. 12

detached houses or regular detached houses.³⁴⁰ The survey found that the large majority (72 %) of Afghanistan's urban population lived in slums or inadequate housing while an average urban household size was estimated at 7.3 persons.³⁴¹ The 2020 BTI report found that most Afghans lacked a safe water supply, adequate sanitation, and hygiene, and the vast majority of the Afghan population had limited access to electricity, especially in rural areas.³⁴² Analysing the conditions for 2019, UNOCHA reported that only 67 % of the population had access to at least basic (improved) drinking water services, with huge disparities between urban (96 %) and rural (57 %) population groups.³⁴³

1.4.4 Refugees, IDPs, returnees

Afghanistan remains the second largest country of origin of refugees in the world, with 2.7 million refugees in the first half of 2019.³⁴⁴ The majority of registered Afghan refugees are hosted by Pakistan (1.4 million) and Iran (951 100).³⁴⁵

Protracted international displacement has defined Afghanistan's history for long.³⁴⁶ Reportedly a third of the population were displaced, in the years following the Soviet invasion of 1979. Of the millions that fled to Iran and Pakistan, some returned to Afghanistan in the early 1990s. Afghanistan's civil war and the advent of the Taliban reignited a new exodus to neighbouring countries.³⁴⁷ The ousting of the Taliban in 2001 coincided with the beginning of a massive wave of returns to Afghans. Between 2001 and 2015, UNHCR assisted 4.8 million Afghans to return and many more are believed to have returned without official assistance.³⁴⁸

According to UNHCR, the return of over 5.2 million Afghan refugees since 2002 assisted by the agency has been 'the largest voluntary repatriation programme in UNHCR's history'.³⁴⁹ While voluntary repatriation has decreased in recent years due to deteriorating security situation and a continued lack of capacity to absorb returnees, Afghan refugees have continued to return.³⁵⁰

In 2016 there was a spike in returns³⁵¹, with about 1 million documented and undocumented Afghans returned to Afghanistan. Over 610 000 people returned from Pakistan and Iran in 2017.³⁵² During 2018, a total of 805 850 returns were registered from Iran and Pakistan, of which 773 125 were from Iran.³⁵³ In 2019, about 500 000 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran (about 485 000) and Pakistan (about 18 800).³⁵⁴ In 2020 (between 1 January and 4 July 2020), IOM recorded a total of 363 963 returns to Afghanistan, over 362 000 of which from Iran, and over 1 880 from Pakistan.³⁵⁵

³⁴⁰ Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. 210-214; see also Afghanistan, State of Afghan Cities 2015, Volume One, 2015, [url](#), p. 86-87

³⁴¹ Afghanistan NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, [url](#), pp. XXXIII, 26

³⁴² Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Afghanistan, 2020, 29 April 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³⁴³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), pp. 14-15

³⁴⁴ UNHCR, Mid-Year Trends 2019, 10 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6; IOM, World Migration Report 2020, 27 November 2019, [url](#), p. 39

³⁴⁵ UNHCR, Mid-Year Trends 2019, 10 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6

³⁴⁶ World Bank, Fragility and population movement in Afghanistan, 3 October 2016, [url](#), p. 1

³⁴⁷ Middle East Research and Information Project, Afghanistan's Refugee Crisis, 24 September 2001, [url](#)

³⁴⁸ World Bank, Fragility and population movement in Afghanistan, 3 October 2016, [url](#), p. 1

³⁴⁹ UNHCR, The Afghanistan Situation: Strengthening International Solidarity & Achieving Solutions, 6 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁰ UNHCR, Afghanistan; Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration: A synopsis; January 2020, January 2020, [url](#)

³⁵¹ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 6

³⁵² UNHCR and IOM, Returns to Afghanistan in 2017: Joint IOM-UNHCR Summary Report, 28 February 2018, [url](#), p. 4

³⁵³ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, (January-December 2018 – 1-5 January 2019), 5 January 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁴ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, (15-28 December 2019), 28 December 2019, [url](#); IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, (29 Dec 2019 – 4 Jan 2020), 4 January 2020, [url](#);

³⁵⁵ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, 15-28 December 2019, (28 June – 4 July 2020), 4 July 2020, [url](#)

As of 1 April 2020, the World Bank reported that the returns of an estimated 1.7 million documented and undocumented Afghan refugees during 2016-2017 remains a pressure on Afghanistan's economy and institutions, stating that both 'internal displacement and large-scale return [...] pose risks to welfare for the displaced and for host communities' within a difficult economic and security context.³⁵⁶

Internal displacements

According to estimations by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's (IDMC) 2020 Global Report, Afghanistan rates fifth among the ten countries with the highest number of IDPs due to conflict and violence, and first for the highest number of people still displaced as a result of natural disasters. As of 31 December 2019, a total of around 4.2 million people were displaced in Afghanistan; of which around 3 million were displaced by conflict and violence and around 1.2 million by natural disaster, especially drought and floods.³⁵⁷

During 2019, due to escalating fighting between the government forces and the Taliban as well as attacks by other armed groups, the number of new IDPs caused by conflict and violence increased to around 461 000, bringing the total number of conflict-induced displacement to around 3 million, the highest figure on record for the country.³⁵⁸ Throughout 2020, both ongoing conflict and natural disasters have continued to drive displacement and humanitarian needs, and many remain displaced as conflict and poverty prevent them from returning to their areas of origin. Due to conflict in their areas of origin, about 111 000 of the 245 000 people displaced in the Western provinces in 2018-19 mainly because of drought, were still displaced as of April 2020.³⁵⁹

Displaced people often live in precarious situation due to inadequate shelter, condition of food insecurity, insufficient access to sanitation and health facilities, as well as a lack of protection.³⁶⁰ Vulnerability forces people, including IDPs, to resort to negative coping mechanism such as early/forced marriages, child labour and begging. UN OCHA noted that this situation has been exacerbated by COVID19. Insecure housing is a main source of vulnerability for many Afghans, particularly IDPs, returnees and women and the risk of eviction is considered 'especially real' for returnees and those unable to pay their rent due to COVID-19.³⁶¹

Deportations and voluntary returns

In 2019, about 505 000 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran (485 000 circa) and Pakistan (19 800 circa).³⁶² Out of the around 485 000 who returned from Iran, about 273 000 were deported. Among those returning from Pakistan, about 2 600 were deported.³⁶³ Between 1 January and 4 July 2020, IOM recorded about 103 000 deportations from Iran, and 77 from Pakistan.³⁶⁴

Forced deportations of Afghan refugees by Iranian authorities have long been reported.³⁶⁵ In the first quarter of 2020, according to media sources Iranian officials were forcibly deporting refugees on a

³⁵⁶ World Bank, Afghanistan Overview, last updated 1 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁷ IDMC, 2020 Global Report on Internal Displacement, 28 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12, 102

³⁵⁸ IDMC, 2020 Global Report on Internal Displacement, 28 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 49-50

³⁵⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Snapshot of Population Movements - January to March 2020, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements (as of 26 April 2020), Actual displacements between 1 January 2020 and 18 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁶¹ UNOCHA, COVID-19 and the Afghanistan Response HRP Revision – June 2020, 8 June 2020, [url](#), p. 6

³⁶² IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, (15-28 December 2019), 28 December 2019, [url](#);

IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, (29 Dec 2019 – 4 Jan 2020), 4 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁶³ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, (29 Dec 2019 – 4 Jan 2020), 4 January 2020, [url](#); IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, (15-28 December 2019), 28 December 2019, [url](#);

³⁶⁴ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, 15-28 December 2019, (28 June – 4 July 2020), 4 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁵ HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran's Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, 20 November 2013, [url](#); VOA, Iran Continues Deporting Undocumented Afghan Refugees, 21 May 2017, [url](#); Aman F. Afghan migrants: Unwanted in Iran and at home, Atlantic council, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

daily basis³⁶⁶, and following the new US sanctions they threatened more deportations.³⁶⁷ In May 2020, Afghan authorities said they were investigating reports of Iranian border guards beating, torturing and then forcing into a river up to 70 Afghan nationals who illegally crossed into Iran. Authorities in the province of Herat said they had retrieved 12 bodies from the Harirud River.³⁶⁸ On 3 May 2020, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) issued a press release confirming that such incident occurred on 1 May 2020 in Karez-e-Elyas village of Gulran district in Herat.³⁶⁹

In 2018, there was a massive increase of returns from Iran, compared to 2017, mostly driven by the political and economic issues of the country.³⁷⁰ In May 2018, US President Donald Trump decided to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers and to reimpose sanctions on Tehran. As a result, Iran's currency weakened and unemployment rose.³⁷¹ Since Afghans mostly work in Iran's informal economy, the demand for their work declined drastically.³⁷² The imposition of new US sanctions in January 2020³⁷³, following an escalation of tension between the US and Iran³⁷⁴, reportedly triggered more returns to Afghanistan, due to the rise of living and healthcare costs, scarcity of jobs and rising hostility from local population towards undocumented Afghans.³⁷⁵

As of 14 March 2020, spontaneous returns from Iran have reached new record totals due to fears over the COVID-19 outbreak. Reporting data by the Border Monitoring Team of the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR), IOM estimated that over 53 069 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran, showing a 171 % increase from the previous week (19 562).³⁷⁶

Pakistan hosted over 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees, as of 18 March 2020.³⁷⁷ However, the actual number of Afghan refugees in the country might be higher than the official numbers, according to the Executive Director of the Society for Human Rights & Prisoners Aid (SHARP), Liaquat Banori, interviewed during a fact-finding mission by the Belgian COI unit Cedoca in February 2020.³⁷⁸

In 2016 there was a spike in returns³⁷⁹, with a total of 620 000 Afghans returned from Pakistan.³⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch stated that, in response to several deadly security incidents and deteriorating political relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Pakistani authorities 'mounted a concerted campaign to drive Afghans out of the country' in 2016.³⁸¹ Between August 2017 and February 2018, the Pakistani government, in close collaboration with the government of Afghanistan and with the

³⁶⁶ FP, Why Iran Is Deporting Scores of Afghan Refugees, 13 January 2020, [url](#); IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans – Weekly Situation Report, (24- 30 May 2020), 30 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁷ New Humanitarian (The), US-Iran tensions push Afghans home to conflict, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁸ RFE/RL, HRW Calls For Investigation Into 'Shocking' Allegation Of Iranian Border Guards Drowning Afghan Migrants, 4 May 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghanistan Investigating Claims Migrants Were Killed by Iranian Guards, 2 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁹ AIHRC, Press Release: Reported Abuse and Drowning of Afghan Refugees Aiming to Cross the Border to Iran, 3 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁰ IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, Weekly Situation Report, (Jan-Dec 2018/1-5 Jan 2019), 5 January 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³⁷¹ RFE/RL, Things Are So Bad In Iran That Afghan Migrants Are Going Home, 1 August 2018, [url](#)

³⁷² IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, Weekly Situation Report, (Jan-Dec 2018/1-5 Jan 2019), 5 January 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³⁷³ CNBS, US slaps new sanctions on Iran following strikes on US targets, 10 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁴ In January 2020, Iranian general Qassim Suleimani, considered as Iran's most powerful military commander, was killed by a US drone in Iraq; which resulted in an escalation of tension between the US and Iran. BBC, Qasem Soleimani: US kills top Iranian general in Baghdad air strike, 3 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁵ New Humanitarian (The), US-Iran tensions push Afghans home to conflict, 6 February 2020, [url](#); New Humanitarian (The), On the move: Conflict, refugee returns fuel Afghanistan displacement, 20 January 2020, [url](#); Aman F. Afghan migrants: Unwanted in Iran and at home, Atlantic council, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁶ IOM, Return of undocumented Afghans, Weekly situation report (8-14 March 2020), 14 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁷ UNHCR, Operational Portal Refugee Situation- Statistics Afghan refugees in Pakistan, last updated: 18 March 2020, [url](#);

UNHCR, Pakistan - Afghan Refugee Info-graphic Update, Monthly Update (February 2020), 18 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁸ During the interview with Belgian Cedoca in February 2020, Liaquat Banori stated that there is no proper and reliable data available on the population of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. According to his opinion, the actual number of Afghan refugees could be higher than the numbers given by UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan. For more information, see EASO COI Report Pakistan: Situation of Afghan Refugees, May 2020, [url](#), p. 17

³⁷⁹ UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 6

³⁸⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Dashboard (as of 31 Dec 2016), 22 March 2017, [url](#)

³⁸¹ HRW, Pakistan Coercion, UN Complicity 13 February 2017. [url](#), p. 1

support of IOM and UNHCR, carried out a country-wide exercise to identify undocumented Afghans. Some 880 000 previously undocumented Afghan nationals were identified during the exercise.³⁸² The goal of the documentation exercise was to provide undocumented Afghans with identification credentials that will allow legalise and regularise their stay in Pakistan for a limited period of time.³⁸³ UNHCR reported that a total of 13 584 Afghans returned from Pakistan in 2018, noting that this was 76 % lower compared to the number of refugees who returned from Pakistan in 2017.³⁸⁴

In June 2019, UNHCR, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed on a 12-point joint declaration, in conclusion of the 30th Tripartite Commission Meeting reaffirming the commitment by the three parties ‘to uphold the principle of voluntary repatriation, in safety and dignity, under the Tripartite Agreement’.³⁸⁵ (For more information see Sections 2.3.2 Return of registered Afghan refugees and 2.3.3 Return of unregistered Afghan refugees in [EASO COI Report, Pakistan: Situation of Afghan refugees, May 2020](#)).

As a precautionary measure linked to the outbreak of COVID-19A, UNHCR temporarily suspended the return of registered Afghan refugees from Pakistan, Iran and other countries as of 4 March 2020.³⁸⁶ As of 30 April 2020, voluntary repatriation from Iran was resumed by UNHCR upon request by the Iranian Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs.³⁸⁷

In a press briefing held in April 2020, UNHCR’ spokesperson Babar Baloch stated that the outbreak of COVID-19 and the lockdown of economic activities have left many Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan with an inability to meet even their most basic needs, and that Afghans continue to return from both Iran and Pakistan despite persistent risks and insecurity in Afghanistan. UNHCR’ spokesperson further warned that ‘a dramatic increase’ in returns could risk creating overwhelming pressure on medical and social services in Afghanistan, in a context of rising poverty levels and ‘hundreds of thousands of people’ already living in displacement sites.³⁸⁸ In their 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview released in December 2019, UNOCHA stated that ‘the return of hundreds of thousands of citizens of Afghanistan from Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Europe each year, combined with the loss of remittances which are vital to the survival of their families at home, is having a de-stabilising impact on peace, prosperity and security in Afghanistan.’³⁸⁹

1.4.5 Children

With 48 % of its population being younger than 15 years, Afghanistan is one of the four countries in the world with the highest proportion of persons under the age of 15.³⁹⁰ In June 2020, UN General Assembly Security Council reported that Afghanistan remained ‘the deadliest conflict for children’³⁹¹, noting that 3 410 grave violations against 3 245 children were verified in 2019.³⁹² Save The Children listed Afghanistan as one of the ten worst conflict-affected countries to be a child, underlining that Afghanistan had the biggest figures for killed and injured children.³⁹³

According to UNAMA, children accounted for 30 % of all civilian casualties in Afghanistan in 2019, which was a 2 % increase from 2018. In 2019, UNAMA documented 3 149 child casualties (874 deaths

³⁸² UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), p. 13

³⁸³ IOM, UN Migration Agency Supports Pakistan’s Documented of Undocumented Afghans, 24 May 2018, [url](#)

³⁸⁴ UNHCR, Afghanistan, Voluntary Repatriation Update, January 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³⁸⁵ UNHCR, Conclusions of the 30th Tripartite Commission meeting between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Pakistan and UNHCR, 18 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁸⁶ UNHCR, Afghanistan Border Monitoring update, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁷ UNHCR, Afghanistan Border Monitoring update - COVID-19 Response (31 May-6 June 2020), 9 June 2020, [url](#), p. 1

³⁸⁸ UNHCR, Coronavirus – Now is not the time to forget Afghanistan and its neighbours, 14 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁸⁹ UNOCHA, 2020 Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview - Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2020, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 28

³⁹⁰ Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-2017: Highlights Report, 2018, [url](#), p. 5

³⁹¹ UNSG, Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary General, A/74/845-S/2020/525, 9 June 2020, [url](#), p. 3

³⁹² UNSG, Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary General, A/74/845-S/2020/525, 9 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

³⁹³ Save The Children, 2020: Gender Matters, n.d., [url](#), p. 12

and 2 275 injured)³⁹⁴, which was a 3 % increase compared to 2018.³⁹⁵ While AGEs were responsible for the majority of child casualties in 2019 (1 535 casualties), which was a 14 % increase compared to 2018, child casualties attributed to PGFs revealed a 2 % decrease (1 032 casualties). With the figure of 39 % or 1 213 casualties (270 killed and 943 injured), the leading cause for child casualties in 2019 were ground engagements between AGEs and PGFs. The indirect fire caused ‘the vast majority of these casualties’, followed by non-suicide IED attacks by AGEs, which displayed an 11 % increase compared to 2018.³⁹⁶ Suicide and complex attacks affecting children increased by 67 % compared to 2018³⁹⁷, causing 460 child casualties (61 killed and 399 injured). The Taliban was responsible for 352 (a 324 % increase from 2018) and ISKP for 92 child casualties (a 39 % decrease compared to 2018) of this type.³⁹⁸

Although there was a decrease in child casualties from air strikes in 2019³⁹⁹, the year still revealed ‘the second highest number of child casualties from air strikes over the last decade’, after record-high levels were documented by UNAMA in 2018. PGFs were responsible for 341 child casualties from air strikes: 69 % were attributed to international military forces, 27 % to the Afghan Air Force, and 4 % to undetermined PGFs.⁴⁰⁰ Even with a 5 % decrease from 2018, ‘children continued to comprise the majority of casualties’ (almost 78 % or 403 casualties) from explosive remnants of war and landmines.⁴⁰¹ Furthermore, UNAMA reported on 39 child casualties, more than twice as many as in 2018, resulted from ‘cross-border incidents in Kunar, Zabul and Khost provinces’ and attributed to Pakistani Military Forces.⁴⁰²

In July 2020, UNAMA reported that 1 067 child casualties (340 killed and 727 injured) were documented for the first half of 2020: ground engagements were reported as the leading cause of child casualties, followed by IEDs and explosive remnants of war.⁴⁰³

According to a survey conducted by Save The Children in April 2019 in selected districts of Kabul, Balkh, Faryab and Sar-e Pul provinces, children lived ‘in fear of explosives, gun violence and the sound of attack helicopters on their way to and at school’ as well as going to the market or playing outside.⁴⁰⁴ As noted by UNAMA, children injured by explosive remnants of war ‘live with lasting detrimental impact on their quality of life due to loss of limbs or eyesight, other serious injuries, and psychological trauma’.⁴⁰⁵ In its 2019 report, UNOCHA found that conflict and natural disasters destroyed ‘normal structures that protect children at national, local and community level’, leading to ‘a high risk of separation of children from their families, psychosocial distress, recruitment into the armed forces and armed groups (particularly for boys), exploitation of boys and girls through child labour, early and forced marriages (especially for girls), denial of education opportunities, and sexual exploitation’.⁴⁰⁶

In June 2020, UN Secretary General reported that the ANA used six schools for military purposes while one school was used by the government and pro-government forces.⁴⁰⁷ UNAMA verified 70 cases that affected ‘access to education’ in 2019: these incidents included targeted attacks on schools, targeting of educational personnel, including killing, injury, and abduction, and threats against education facilities and staff. The eastern and central regions displayed the majority of incidents (18 each) and

³⁹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 21

³⁹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³⁹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 21-22

³⁹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 21

³⁹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 22-23

³⁹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 21

⁴⁰⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 23

⁴⁰¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 22

⁴⁰² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 21-22

⁴⁰³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁰⁴ Save The Children, Many Afghan Children are Afraid to go Outside, New Survey by Save The Children Finds, 19 November 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 31

⁴⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 68

⁴⁰⁷ UN, Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary General [A/74/845-S/2020/525], 9 June 2020, [url](#), p. 6

were followed by the north-eastern region (12 incidents). During the incidents, nine students were killed and 29 injured.⁴⁰⁸

Noting that the numbers of child recruitment must be higher than documented, UNAMA reported on the recruitment and use of 64 boys in 2019: 58 by the Taliban, 3 by the Afghan national security forces, and 3 by pro-government armed groups (Afghan Local Police and pro-government militias). The Taliban was reported to use children to plant IEDs, transport explosives, assist in intelligence gathering, carry out suicide attacks, and participate in hostilities.⁴⁰⁹ In the period between 1 January and 30 June 2020, UNAMA verified the recruitment of 23 children by the Taliban: 22 of them were recruited in the north-eastern region and one in the eastern region. According to UNAMA, there was an increase in the number of reports received by the mission in the connection of recruitment and use of children by the Afghan national security forces across the country. While UNAMA was still working on the verification of the reports, the children were allegedly used by Afghan National Police and Afghan Local Police as bodyguards and drivers and were engaged in combat roles at checkpoints; cases of sexual exploitation, including *bacha bazi*, were also reported.⁴¹⁰

In 2019, documented cases of sexual violence were reported to affect 13 boys and five girls and were attributed to the Taliban (14), Afghan National Police (3), and Afghan Local Police and pro-government militia (1). Two boys were reported to be used as *bacha bazi*.⁴¹¹ AIHRC reported on sexual abuse occurring in schools and other locations in Logar province.⁴¹²

The Child Rights Protection Law was enacted by President Ghani in March 2019. Defining ‘a child as a person who has not “completed” the age of 18’, the law aims to end recruitment and use of children as well as the practice of *bacha bazi*, which is in line with the 2018 revised Penal Code.⁴¹³ However, in March 2020, the ANN researcher Rohullah Soroush noted that the ratification of the legislation to protect the rights of children by the Wolesi Jirga (House of People) remained blocked due to a disagreement over ‘the definition of a child’ as ‘a small group of MPs, mostly religious scholars and/or with a jihadi background’ saw ‘the definition of a child as under-18’ as a contravention to the *sharia*.⁴¹⁴

1.5 Geographical overview

1.5.1 Urban-rural divide

According to the Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA), around 71 % of the population (23.4 million) is estimated to live in rural areas and 24.4 % (8 million) in urban areas in 2020-2021; 4.6 % (1.5 million) of the population is officially estimated to pursue a nomadic way of life.⁴¹⁵ According to NSIA, urban areas display a higher population growth because of rural-urban migration.⁴¹⁶

According to the researcher Antonio Giustozzi, Afghanistan’s history is characterised by a structural urban-rural divide. While urban centres became hubs for administration, market-driven methods of production, taxation, education, judiciary, and reforms, the rural population was left aside from these

⁴⁰⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 27

⁴⁰⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 24

⁴¹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 20

⁴¹¹ UN, Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary General A/74/845-S/2020/525, 9 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-6

⁴¹² UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General A/74/753-S/220/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 10

⁴¹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2019, February 2020, [url](#), p. 23

⁴¹⁴ Soroush, R., Child Rights Protection Law in Afghanistan: Can the parliamentary chaos be resolved, AAN, 18 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴¹⁵ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. iii

⁴¹⁶ Afghanistan, NSIA, Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2018-19, July 2019, [url](#), p. 2

developments, which caused a feeling of resentment in rural inhabitants.⁴¹⁷ Several sources describe the rural population as ‘more conservative’ and ‘traditional’ with many living ‘in absolute or near-absolute poverty’⁴¹⁸ and facing realities of war ‘as a part of daily life’⁴¹⁹ in contrast with urban dwellers, who are ‘more liberal’, have more opportunities to gain income and include a class of urban elites and persons engaged in ‘family politics’.⁴²⁰

Asia Foundation 2019 Survey found that 79 % of urban respondents and 73 % of rural interviewees indicated insecurity/crime as a reason for pessimism about the direction in which the country is going. Pessimism due to concerns with the economy was mentioned by 52 % of urban respondents compared with 38 % of those living in rural areas. At the same time, rural respondents cited lack of infrastructure and/or services twice as often as urban interviewees (8 % compared to 4 %). Foreign intervention was seen as a reason for pessimism by 8 % of rural and 3 % of urban respondents.⁴²¹

In 2015, the Taliban set as an objective to ‘capture and hold towns and provincial capitals’.⁴²² Following attempts of capturing provincial centres like Kunduz City, Lashkargah in Helmand, Pul-e Khumri in Baghlan, Farah City, Tarinkot in Uruzgan, and Maimana in Faryab in 2015, 2016 and 2017⁴²³, in August 2018 Taliban insurgents carried out a large-scale attack on Ghazni City.⁴²⁴ As reported by the UN Secretary General in February 2019, ‘the Taliban succeeded in temporarily capturing 21 district administrative centres throughout the year, the second highest level since the security transition to the Afghan forces at the end of 2014’.⁴²⁵ At the end of August and beginning of September 2019, the Taliban conducted large-scale offensives against provincial capitals of Kunduz, Pul-e Khurmi, and Farah.⁴²⁶

According to the 2019 Asia Foundation survey, feeling fear of the Taliban and ISIL was expressed by 93 % and 95 % of the respondents.⁴²⁷ Almost 69 % of the respondents said that the Taliban posed a threat in their local area; rural inhabitants (almost 76 %) saw a threat in the Taliban twice often than respondents living in urban areas (around 37 %).⁴²⁸

1.5.2 Regional differences

According to the June 2020 report by the UN Secretary General, the southern region saw the highest number of incidents between February and May 2020; second highest figures were documented by UNAMA in eastern and northern regions. Overall, the incidents taken place in these three regions accounted for 59 % of all incidents.⁴²⁹ In the course of offensives against provincial capitals of the provinces of Kunduz, Pul-e Khurmi, and Farah, conducted by the Taliban in August-September 2019,

⁴¹⁷ Giustozzi, A. and Ibrahimi, N., Thirty Years of Conflict: drivers of anti-Government Mobilisation in Afghanistan, 1978-2011, January 2012, [url](#), pp. 7-8

⁴¹⁸ Asey, T., The Price of Inequality: The Dangerous Rural-Urban Divide in Afghanistan, Global Security Review, last updated 9 June 2019, [url](#)

⁴¹⁹ Feroz, E., Let’s face the truth, rural Afghanistan has been lost, TRT World, 16 April 2019, [url](#)

⁴²⁰ Asey, T., The Price of Inequality: The Dangerous Rural-Urban Divide in Afghanistan, Global Security Review, last updated 9 June 2019, [url](#)

⁴²¹ Asia Foundation (The), Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 43

⁴²² BBC News, Why are the Taliban resurgent in Afghanistan?, 5 January 2016, [url](#)

⁴²³ Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban threatens another provincial capital in the Afghan north, 21 October 2016, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban Assaults Provincial Capital in southeastern Afghanistan, 22 May 2017, [url](#)

⁴²⁴ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General A/73/624-S/2018/1092, 7 December 2018, [url](#), p. 6

⁴²⁵ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General A/73/777-S/2019/193, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁴²⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 36-37

⁴²⁷ Asia Foundation (The), Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People, 2 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 18, 57

⁴²⁸ Asia Foundation (The), Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People, 2 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 19, 62

⁴²⁹ UN General Assembly, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General [A/74/897-S/2020/549], 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

the attack on Kunduz ‘had the largest impact on civilians’, causing 99 casualties (20 killed and 79 injured), 55 of which were attributed to the Taliban and 44 to the Afghan national security forces.⁴³⁰ While the fighting was reported to decrease at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 ‘in line with seasonal trends during the winter months’, the provinces of Kandahar, Helmand, Nangahar, and Balkh were the most active conflict areas between November 2019 and February 2020.⁴³¹ During the period between March and June 2020, ‘the highest amount of conflict activity’ was reported in the provinces of Kandahar, Helmand, Wardak, and Balkh.⁴³²

As reported by UNAMA, ISKP maintained its presence in some areas in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar. Following the start of a military operation in Achin district, Nangarhar province, in November 2019, ISKP fighters in the eastern region were reported to surrender. Civilian casualties resulting from ISKP attacks were documented in Kabul, Ghazni, Herat, Laghman, and Khost provinces.⁴³³ USDOS reported that ISKP resumed ‘terrorist attacks against ANDSF and Coalition Forces’ in February 2020; moreover, in spring 2020 the group conducted several large-scale attacks in Kabul.⁴³⁴

In communication with EASO in 2019, a military analyst specialising in Afghanistan-related issues noted that the Taliban and ISKP pursued different strategies. While the Taliban fighters focused their attacks mostly against security forces and/or Afghan government employees, trying to avoid ‘collateral damage’ among the civilian population, ISKP targeted also Shias and non-cooperating civilians, aiming to reach high numbers of civilian casualties, which allowed for a high number of ‘collateral damage’.⁴³⁵ As found in a research study on ISKP’s ‘Kabul cell’ published by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) in June 2020, the two groups had also different recruitment systems. While the Taliban recruited ‘typically’ unemployed, *madrasa*-educated young Pashtuns from rural communities, ISKP had cells in urban centres and recruited men and women from middle-class families, with many university students of non-Pashtun origin, predominantly from Kabul City and the surrounding urban centres of Parwan, Kapisa, and Panjsher provinces.⁴³⁶ According to the research, ‘with the exception of a minority made up of original Kabulis and a number of Uzbeks from Jawzjan, Takhar, and Faryab provinces in the far north of the country, the membership of ISKP’s Kabul cell is composed of youth from the areas of *muqawamat* (anti-Taliban resistance)’, who have either settled in Kabul or visit it regularly.⁴³⁷

In 2019, the provinces of Badakhshan, Badghis, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Kunduz, Laghman, and Nangarhar were ‘the main provinces of origin and displacement for conflict-affected communities’.⁴³⁸

1.5.3 Government versus Taliban control

As stated by the AAN co-Director Kate Clark in May 2017, many assessments of territorial control in Afghanistan were made in recent years. Besides the disagreement over figures, there were also debates over the definition of the word ‘control’; moreover, assertions were made about the meaning of ‘loss of government control’, partly linked to deliberate withdrawals to areas deemed to be of more strategic importance.⁴³⁹ As noted by ANN expert Thomas Ruttig, there are different counts of the

⁴³⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 35

⁴³¹ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General A/74/753-S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁴³² UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General [A/74/897-S/2020/549], 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁴³³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 36-37

⁴³⁴ USDOS, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 18

⁴³⁵ Military analyst, confidential communication, 14 January 2019, in EASO, Afghanistan – Security Situation, June 2019, [url](#), p. 58

⁴³⁶ Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, Peaceworks No 62, 1 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 2, 11. The research is based on 65 interviews with current and former ISKP members, their families, and friends, conducted in Kabul city, the surrounding provinces, and the provinces of Nangahar and Kunar in November 2019.

⁴³⁷ Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, Peaceworks No 62, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

⁴³⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 67

⁴³⁹ Clark, K., Looking at the ‘Nicholson plan’: A bid to tilt the Afghan war in the government’s favour, AAN, 24 May 2017, [url](#)

number of districts, ranging from 379 to 407⁴⁴⁰, which has to be considered when analysing assessments by different sources.

As reported by UN Secretary General, on 31 December 2019, the Taliban allegedly captured Darzab district in Jawzjan province after the withdrawal of the ANDSF. The Taliban also took the control over Arghandab district, Zabul province, while the ANDSF recaptured Guzargahi Nur district in Baghlan province, which was held by the Taliban since September 2019.⁴⁴¹ In June 2020, the UN Secretary General reported that neither PGFs nor AGEs ‘achieved any significant territorial gains’ between March and June 2020. In March 2020, the Taliban recaptured Yamgan district, Badakhshan province, while in April the ANDSF overtook the districts of Khamyab and Qarqin in Jowzjan province, held by the Taliban for around two years.⁴⁴² In June 2020, USDOS reported that the Afghan government maintained its control in ‘Kabul, provincial capitals, major population centres, most district centres, and most portions of major ground lines of communications (GLOCs)’, while the Taliban threatened district centres and contested ‘several positions of main GLOCs’.⁴⁴³ According to the Afghan authorities, ‘the Taliban carried out 422 attacks in 32 provinces’ during the third week of June, killing almost 300 Afghan security personnel, making the week the ‘deadliest’ in the course of the conflict.⁴⁴⁴

An assessment of the Long War Journal (LWJ) mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, considered 133 districts of Afghanistan (33 %) to be under the control of GoA or have undetermined status, 189 districts (47 %) to be contested, 75 districts (19 %) to be held by the Taliban; one district was assessed as ‘unconfirmable Taliban claim of control’.⁴⁴⁵ According to the population figures, 15 million people were living in areas controlled by GoA or having undetermined status, while 13 million Afghans found themselves in contested areas and 4.5 million in the Taliban-controlled areas.⁴⁴⁶

1.6 Mobility

According to UNAMA report for 2019, Afghan people’s movement was restricted by ‘threats on major roads and highways’, including Taliban-organised abductions, which created a climate of fear.⁴⁴⁷ Highway 1, or Ring Road, which is the most important highway and connects Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, and Kandahar⁴⁴⁸ was reported to be partly destroyed and contaminated with IEDs by the Taliban during the offensive on Ghazni City in August 2018.⁴⁴⁹ The Taliban blocked the parts of the road between Baghlan and Balkh during the attacks on Kunduz in 2015 and 2018.⁴⁵⁰ Following the August 2019 offensives on Dasht-e Archi district, Kunduz province, and Pul-e Khurmi district, Baghlan province, the Taliban was reported to having blocked roads to Highway 1 in the direction to Kabul for more than two weeks.⁴⁵¹ In July 2020, local media reported that several parts of the Baghlan-Balkh Highway,

⁴⁴⁰ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁴¹ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General [A/74/753-S/220/210], 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁴⁴² UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General [A/74/897-S/2020/549], 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁴⁴³ USDOS, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 18

⁴⁴⁴ France 24, Taliban killed 291 Afghan security personnel in past week: govt, 23 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁵ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

⁴⁴⁶ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

⁴⁴⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 50

⁴⁴⁸ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁴⁹ UN News, ‘No safe way’ into battle-scarred Afghan city of Ghazni to deliver aid as traumatized children search for parents, 17 August 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁰ Hewad, G., The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, AAN, 21 October 2015, [url](#); Ali, O., Taliban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 ANA soldiers killed in Kunduz attack, 26 April 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁵¹ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 - Afghanistan, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

connecting Kabul with northern and north-eastern provinces, were blocked due to the Taliban-initiated clashes.⁴⁵²

In 2019 and the first part of 2020, the incidents affecting mobility comprised clashes between PGFs and AGEs⁴⁵³, checkpoints⁴⁵⁴, abductions⁴⁵⁵, and killings.⁴⁵⁶ IEDs planted on roads and highways were reported to cause casualties among civilians⁴⁵⁷, military⁴⁵⁸, and police.⁴⁵⁹ Travellers were reported to face 'taxes'⁴⁶⁰ charged along main roads, which became a source of revenue for the Taliban.⁴⁶¹ According to USDOS, drivers, including taxi, truck and bus drivers, reported on checkpoints 'operated by security forces and insurgent groups, who extorted money and goods from travellers'.⁴⁶² The local media specified that the cases of extortion at checkpoints established by 'Taliban insurgents as well as government forces' became frequent on the Kandahar-Kabul, Kandahar-Herat, and Kabul-Torkham Highways⁴⁶³; cases of extortion were reported also, for instance, on the highway connecting Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province, and Dar-e Suf district, Samangan province⁴⁶⁴, and the Baghlan-Balkh Highway.⁴⁶⁵

According to the Asia Foundation 2019 survey, almost 80 % of Afghans reported 'some or lot of fear when travelling from one part of the country to another'. Some or lot of fear when travelling was particularly expressed by interviewees of Uruzgan (89 %), Faryab (87 %), Sar-e Pul, Khost, and Ghazni (86 % each), and Kabul (85 %). Among women, 34 % reported a lot of fear when travelling; this figure was higher in Ghazni (66 %), Panjshir (57 %), and Bamyan (48 %).⁴⁶⁶ Referring to the 2018 WOA Assessment, UNOCHA reported that 61 % of displaced households in Hilmand, Uruzgan, Zabul, Khost, and Paktia said that women felt 'less safe when travelling to or at specific locations' or could 'be subject/vulnerable to violence'.⁴⁶⁷

Afghanistan's major population centres can be reached either by land or by air.⁴⁶⁸ In more remote areas, road conditions are often bad and the roads 'are regularly closed due to flooding, landslides, snow or avalanches in high altitude areas'. As noted by UNOCHA, such provinces as Baghlan, Kunar, Logar, Maidan Wardak, Nuristan, Panjshir, Samangan, and Sar-e Pul 'have no functioning airstrips and air traffic is regularly interrupted by poor weather'.⁴⁶⁹

According to the airport map produced by the Austrian Country of Origin Information unit in March 2019, scheduled passenger services to domestic and international destinations exist from Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and Mazar-e Sharif while domestic airports with scheduled passenger function in the provinces of Farah, Helmand, Nimroz, and Uruzgan.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁵² Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵³ AA, Taliban, Afghan forces clash in Balkh province, 18 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁴ Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁵ Al-Jazeera, What peace means for Afghanistan's Hazara people, 18 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, A Country Where Driving Makes You a Target, 26 December 2019, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Danesh Calls for Security Along Daikundi-Uruzgan Road, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁶ NYT, A Country Where Driving Makes You a Target, 26 December 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁷ RFE/RL, Dozens killed as Bus Hits Roadside Bomb In Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Nine Civilians Killed in Kandahar Roadside Mine Blast, 3 June 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, 6 Civilians Killed by Paktika Roadside Bomb, 20 April 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Six Civilians Killed in Mine Blast in Jawzjan, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁸ GardaWorld, Afghanistan: Multiple IED attacks in Khost and Daikundi provinces April 21, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵⁹ Tolonews, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁰ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 - Afghanistan, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶¹ Salaam Times, Afghan forces move to secure highways against Taliban's 'customs tax' extortion, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁶² USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 - Afghanistan, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶³ Tolonews, Drivers Outraged Over Extortion on Highways, 17 January 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces, Taliban extort money on Mazar-Dara-i-Suf road, 9 December 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁵ Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶⁶ Asia Foundation (The), Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 63

⁴⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 69

⁴⁶⁸ EASO, Afghanistan – Security Situation, June 2019, [url](#), p. 65

⁴⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, [url](#), p. 11

⁴⁷⁰ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019, available upon request at [url](#) (accessed by EASO on 25 March 2019)

Hamid Karzai International Airport (KBL), known as Khwaja Rawash Airport⁴⁷¹, is located at a distance of 16 kilometres from Kabul city centre.⁴⁷² In November 2019, a suicide car blast near the airport caused civilian casualties.⁴⁷³ Kandahar Airport, named Ahmad Shah Baba International Airport and serving as the country's second main airport, is situated 16 kilometres south-east of Kandahar City.⁴⁷⁴ Herat International Airport (HEA) is situated 18 kilometres south of Herat City.⁴⁷⁵ Mazar-e-Sharif International Airport (MZR), or Mawlana Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi International Airport, is located 8 kilometres from Mazar-e-Sharif.⁴⁷⁶ In January 2019, an air corridor connecting Mazar-e Sharif and Europe via Turkey was opened for cargo flights.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷¹ Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg, I Afghanistan (version 3.1), 2 July 2019, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁷² Hamid Karzai International Airport, Hamid Karzai International Airport, n.d., [url](#), (accessed 10 July 2020)

⁴⁷³ Washington Post (The), 12 killed in Kabul suicide blast, including children, 13 November 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁴ Ahmad Shah Baba International Airport, n.d., [url](#) (accessed 10 July 2020)

⁴⁷⁵ Afghanistan, Civil Aviation Authority, Aeronautical Information Publication, Aerodrom (AD) Part 3, Edition 89-2020, 21 May 2020, [url](#), p. 100

⁴⁷⁶ Afghanistan, Civil Aviation Authority, Aeronautical Information Publication, 21 May 2020, [url](#), p. 241

⁴⁷⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Mazar-i-Sharif-Turkey-Europe air corridor formally opens, 9 January 2019, [url](#)

2. Regional description of the security situation in Afghanistan

2.1 Kabul City

2.1.1 General description of the city

Kabul City is the capital of Afghanistan and of Kabul province, of which it is a separate district alongside 14 others.⁴⁷⁸ Surrounded by mountains, the city is located at 1 800 metres above sea level.⁴⁷⁹ Kabul City expanded from 12 districts or city wards to 22 urban districts⁴⁸⁰, which coincide with Kabul's 22 Police Districts (PDs).⁴⁸¹ According to estimates for 2020-21 by Afghanistan's NSIA, Kabul City has a population of 4 434 550.⁴⁸² However, exact population figures are disputed and estimates range from 3.5 million up to a possible 6.5 million inhabitants in 2020.⁴⁸³

Kabul is by far Afghanistan's most populous and influential city, characterised by an unprecedented demographic and urban growth.⁴⁸⁴ Massive returnee populations, IDPs and economic migrants have spurred this rapid growth⁴⁸⁵, but the city's infrastructure has not followed at the same pace.⁴⁸⁶ According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, the Afghan capital's 'rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation has created new economic and security challenges inside the city', with 'the residual urban social fabric that helped to preserve a certain social order, guaranteeing some degrees of security, now disappearing fast'.⁴⁸⁷ As described by several sources, the main problems currently afflicting the Afghan capital are inadequate housing and sanitation, overstretched basic services and resources, unemployment, land grabbing, poverty, traffic and limited accessibility, severe air pollution and criminality.⁴⁸⁸

Kabul City is laid out as a circle consisting of three concentric rings: the first one includes Shahr-e Kohna, the old city, Shahr-e Naw, the new city, as well as Shash Darak and Wazir Akbar Khan, where many foreign embassies, international organisations and offices are located. The second ring consists of neighbourhoods developed in the 1950s-1980s to host the growing urban population, like Taimani, Qala-e Fatullah, Kart-e Se, Kart-e Chahar, Kart-e Naw and the *microraisons* (Soviet-style residential

⁴⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Kabul Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁹ REACH, Area Based Community Profile: Kabul, Afghanistan, December 2017, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁸⁰ Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 10

⁴⁸¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Informal Settlements, 4 January 2016, [url](#); Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁸² Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 8

⁴⁸³ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; IGC, Urbanisation in Fragile Societies: Thinking about Kabul, 4 December 2019, [url](#); City Mayors Statistics, The World's Largest Cities and Urban Areas in 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁴ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; IGC, Urbanisation in Fragile Societies: Thinking about Kabul, 4 December 2019, [url](#); Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁵ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 5; APPRO, Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?, October 2012, [url](#), pp. 6-8; Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁶ Ruttig, T., Alltag in Kabul. Referat von Thomas Ruttig (AAN) am 12. April 2017, 20 June 2017, [url](#); NRC and ACAPS, Displacement and Access in Afghanistan: Scenarios, June 2019, [url](#), p. 11

⁴⁸⁷ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸⁸ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Al Jazeera, Life in the City: Tackling Kabul's Urban Challenges, 11 July 2019, [url](#); Migrationsverket - Finnish Immigration Service, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 3, 7-8; DW, Kabul - Where Breathing Can Kill You, 6 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime?, 8 February 2020, [url](#)

districts). The outer, growing ring of the city expanded rapidly after 2001, mainly housing Afghans who have migrated to the capital since then and some high-profile residential compounds.⁴⁸⁹ Kabul City hosts an airport served by international and domestic scheduled passenger flights.⁴⁹⁰

Kabul is an ethnically diverse city, with communities from almost all Afghan ethnicities. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluch, Sikhs and Hindus all reside there, with no group clearly dominating.⁴⁹¹ According to Foschini, central Kabul is ‘cosmopolitan’ and more mixed than in the past, with the constant movement of residents having a disruptive effect on social networks.⁴⁹² Districts in Kabul’s outskirts are ethnically more homogenous.⁴⁹³ As people tend to move to areas where they already have family or into particular districts as part of a larger group with the same ethnicity, different city neighbourhoods have become associated with different ethnic groups.⁴⁹⁴ In these densely populated areas, a sort of ‘village society’ has emerged, whose dwellers know each other and have more direct connections with their province of origin than with central Kabul.⁴⁹⁵

Because of its high concentration of government buildings, international organisations, diplomatic compounds and national and international security forces, the capital has a distinct security outlook.⁴⁹⁶ In the wake of several attacks in January 2018, the approval of a new security plan for the Afghan capital was announced⁴⁹⁷ and the Kabul Enhanced Security Zone (ESZ) was established.⁴⁹⁸ New and improved security measures have been implemented since then -including: additional temporary checkpoints, access surveillance, additional road blockades and increased patrolling, increased reconnaissance and intelligence activities.⁴⁹⁹ Kabul’s new security measures were reported to have exacerbated the city’s traffic problems⁵⁰⁰ and caused protests among residents⁵⁰¹. In June 2020, the implementation of a new security plan for Kabul City was reportedly ordered by President Ghani.⁵⁰²

2.1.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul City

Although the Afghan capital is under government control⁵⁰³, Kabul remains a target for AGEs who continue to carry out attacks in the city.⁵⁰⁴ According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig, suicide and complex attacks in urban centres like Kabul ‘do not directly change the balance of power on the

⁴⁸⁹ Foschini, F., *Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid*, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), p. 6; Foschini, F., *Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making*, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-27

⁴⁹⁰ Hamid Karzai International Airport [website], n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, *Elections 2019: Kabul Province Background Profile*, n.d., [url](#); Foschini, F., *Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid*, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 6; Foschini, F., *Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making*, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-27

⁴⁹² Foschini, F., *Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making*, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁹³ Foschini, F., *Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid*, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), pp. 6, 58

⁴⁹⁴ APPRO, *Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?*, October 2012, [url](#), p. 8; IGC, *Urbanisation in Fragile Societies: Thinking about Kabul*, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁵ Foschini, F., *Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid*, USIP, April 2017, [url](#), p. 7; Foschini, F., *Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making*, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁹⁶ Foschini, F., *Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid*, USIP, 10 April 2017, [url](#), p. 5; Osman, B., *A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who Are the Most Likely Perpetrators?*, AAN, 7 June 2017, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁷ RFE/RL, *New Security Plan In Kabul After Deadly Attacks*, 7 February 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹⁸ USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2018*, 3 July 2018, [url](#), pp. 1, 15, 43, 46-47

⁴⁹⁹ EFE, *Kabul Implements New Security Plan Following Repeated Assaults on City*, 18 February 2018, [url](#); Safer Edge, *Safer Edge Insights: New Security Measures in Kabul*, 20 February 2018, [url](#); USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2018*, 20 December 2018, [url](#), p. 36

⁵⁰⁰ Frontier Post (The), *Kabul’s New Security Plan Irks Residents*, 23 February 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, *WAK Residents Bear The Brunt Of Tightened Security*, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰¹ South China Monitoring Post, *Life Inside Kabul’s Fortified Green Zone for Foreigners*, 19 March 2019, [url](#); NYT, *After Bombing, Afghans Demand That Foreigners Leave Their Neighbourhood*, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁰² Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on: 30 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁰³ USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020*, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 2, 18

⁵⁰⁴ USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019*, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 16; Ruttig, T., *First Breakthrough Toward Peace? A Look at the Seven Day ‘Reduction of Violence’*, AAN, 17 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, *Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019*, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 36-37, 84-85, 94

battlefield, but do have propaganda impacts'.⁵⁰⁵ USDOD describes the objectives of militant groups conducting suicide attacks in Kabul as attracting international media attention, creating the perception of widespread insecurity and undermining the Afghan government's legitimacy as well as the population's confidence in the Afghan security forces.⁵⁰⁶

Several sources have reported on an infiltration of the Taliban in Kabul City, with information/intelligence networks supporting the movement.⁵⁰⁷ According to USDOD, the Taliban have continued to prioritise attacks in Kabul in 2019, although their ground movements in the capital have been reduced.⁵⁰⁸ The Taliban strategy in the third quarter of 2019 was described as a mixture of 'fight and talk', combining several high-profile attacks in Kabul City with continuous peace negotiations for a US troop withdrawal.⁵⁰⁹ According to analysts interviewed by Landinfo in October 2019, the Taliban's capacity has not diminished and their rhetoric has not changed, indicating that the insurgence group could turn back to large suicide attacks in Kabul to show its strength.⁵¹⁰

According to 2019 United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) figures cited by UNAMA, ISKP security-related incidents have decreased in Kabul.⁵¹¹ Continued ANDSF pressure and several raids on ISKP hideouts in the capital region have reportedly disrupted the militant group's activities and ability to conduct high-profile attacks in Kabul.⁵¹² However, at the same time, ISKP is reported to remain active and threatening, maintaining an operational capacity in the capital.⁵¹³ In June 2020, USDOD suggested the militants might be moving to smaller groups in urban areas, which are harder to locate and identify.⁵¹⁴ After a six-month period of no ISKP-claimed assaults in Kabul at the end of 2019 and in the first months of 2020, several attacks have been attributed to the group again since March 2020 (see below).⁵¹⁵ According to researcher Amira Jadoon, ISKP's interest in Kabul can be related to various factors: the capital being the most densely populated region in the country, providing opportunities to strike both state and civilian targets and located close to ISKP's strongholds in the east.⁵¹⁶

ISKP is reported to have maintained an active cell in Kabul.⁵¹⁷ According to analyst Borhan Osman, ISKP's Kabul cell is an 'almost entirely Afghan phenomenon', recruiting urban youth from diverse socio-

⁵⁰⁵ Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁰⁶ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 16

⁵⁰⁷ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and the Intimidation Campaign, Landinfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), p. 10; Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 21-22; Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 54

⁵⁰⁸ USDOD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 April - 30 June 2019, 20 August 2019, [url](#), p. 14

⁵⁰⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 15, 25

⁵¹⁰ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 24

⁵¹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 110

⁵¹² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 25-26; UNSC, Tenth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of UN Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat, 4 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 9

⁵¹³ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/73/990-S/2019/703, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 6; UNSC, Tenth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of UN Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7; Withington, S. & Ehsani, H., Islamic State Wilayat Khorasan: Phoney Caliphate or Bonafide Province, AISS, 5 March 2020, [url](#), p. 83; VoA, Pushed to the Brink Again, Islamic State's Afghan Affiliate Claims Deadly Attacks, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

⁵¹⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 28

⁵¹⁵ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/74/897-S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁵¹⁶ Jadoon, M., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organisational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Combating Terrorism Center, 3 December 2018, [url](#), p. 14

⁵¹⁷ UNSC, Eight Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of UN Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat, 1 February 2019, [url](#), p. 7; USDOD, Lead

economic backgrounds (often from middle class-families) in the capital and in the surrounding provinces of Parwan, Panjsher and Kapisa. In contrast to the usually reported pattern of Pashtun recruitment into Afghanistan's militant extremist groups, a majority of Kabul's ISKP cell's members and supporters reportedly come from predominantly Tajik areas.⁵¹⁸ Osman points at the scarcity of reliable information about the Kabul cell's operational methods. Instructions to organise and carry out attacks in the capital have reportedly often been relayed directly to small ISKP leadership circles in Nangarhar province. According to senior Afghan security officials, all the ISKP-claimed attacks in the capital depended on the same supply and logistics chain from a single network, also used for attacks by the Taliban (including the Haqqani Network), likely having the support of corrupt government security figures. According to Osman, the Taliban's limiting of attacks in urban areas in the months following the Doha Agreement with the US on 29 February 2020 seems to have encouraged ISKP's Kabul cell to seize the opportunity to gain greater visibility and to cast itself as an alternative force to the Taliban.⁵¹⁹

ISKP reportedly applies an effective recruitment strategy (often online, through social media)⁵²⁰ in the capital, conducting outreach activities in religious and academic institutions, including Kabul University.⁵²¹ University professors recruiting for ISKP and first-grade students joining their ranks reportedly give the militant's group's cell in the capital an elite character. Mid-career professionals, business owners and well-educated urbanites are mostly recruited for logistical, financial or communication roles, often leading a double life.⁵²² According to analyst Osman, the growing appeal of ISKP's Salafi-Jihadist ideology among urban Afghan youth may explain the militant group's resilience. The search for ideological 'purity', commitment to rigidly practicing Islamic Law, support for an anti-Shia sectarian agenda, strong in-group solidarity and egalitarian behaviour, enthusiasm for a global jihad and the 'fantasy of living under the caliphate' are suggested as pull-factors attracting Kabul's youth to ISKP. A growing dissatisfaction with the current elite and the status quo of the Afghan political system is indicated as a push factor driving urban youth to search for a radical alternative.⁵²³

In March 2019, the Haqqani Network was described as 'maintaining a significant terror network in Kabul'.⁵²⁴ In recent years, the network is believed to be responsible for several complex attacks on government and international targets in heavily populated areas of the city.⁵²⁵ In June 2020, the UN Security Council reported on a 'tactical accommodation' between the Haqqani Network and ISKP in Kabul, referring to a certain degree of 'involvement, facilitation or technical assistance' of the Haqqanis in ISKP-claimed attacks in the capital.⁵²⁶

Attacks in Kabul City often remain unclaimed or are conducted by unidentified armed groups.⁵²⁷ Analysts highlight the challenge in assessing the credibility of claims or denials of involvement in certain attacks -referring to indications that diverse pro-ISKP groups claim attacks that have not been

Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 October - 31 December 2019, 19 February 2020, [url](#), p. 13

⁵¹⁸ Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-4, 11-14

⁵¹⁹ Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 9-10

⁵²⁰ USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan* - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 26

⁵²¹ VoA, *Afghan University Teacher, Students Among IS Operatives Arrested in Kabul*, 8 July 2019, [url](#)

⁵²² Washington Post (The), *Afghanistan Claims the Islamic State Was 'Obliterated'. But Fighters Who Got Away Could Stage a Resurgence*, 9 February 2020, [url](#); Withington, S. & Ehsani, H., *Islamic State Wilayat Khorasan: Phoney Caliphate or Bonafide Province*, AISS, 5 March 2020, [url](#), p. 86; Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-14

⁵²³ Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State*, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 15-20

⁵²⁴ LWJ, UN: *Al Qaeda Continues to View Afghanistan as a 'Safe Haven'*, 5 March 2019, [url](#)

⁵²⁵ UNAMA, *Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019*, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 85

⁵²⁶ UNSC, *Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan*, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 18-19

⁵²⁷ UNSG, *The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security*, A/73/777-S/2019/193, 28 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 6-7; UNAMA, *Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2020: 1 January - 30 June 2020*, 27 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 10-11

carried out by them and the Taliban often denying their involvement in attacks causing high numbers of civilian casualties.⁵²⁸

In terms of the presence of government security forces, the responsibility for Kabul's enhanced security zone has been transferred to the Kabul Security Force (KSF). ANP forces maintain responsibility for security within the city, with the special Crisis Response Unit (CRU 222)⁵²⁹ addressing (high-profile) attacks. The independent ANA division for the capital (111)⁵³⁰ secures the perimeter of the city. The capital NDS corps ensures that intelligence sharing remains focused on the prevention of high-profile attacks.⁵³¹

According to AAN analyst Foschini, security concerns in Kabul are not limited to AGE attacks alone, but include a significant rise in criminality. Foschini relates Kabul's surging crime scene to growing unemployment, combined with the increasing influence of heavily armed and politically connected criminal networks⁵³², as well as the impact of changing patterns in the social behaviour of Kabul's youth. Foschini differentiates between targeted killings disguised as criminally-motivated attacks and common criminality in the city⁵³³: home raids and personally-driven murders⁵³⁴ in central city areas that used to be considered relatively safe⁵³⁵, organised petty theft on public transport, armed robberies⁵³⁶ and violent car-jackings, an increase in narco-trafficking and drug-related crimes⁵³⁷ in several city areas and kidnappings⁵³⁸ and extortion⁵³⁹ by organised criminal gangs.⁵⁴⁰ According to UNHCR, kidnapping is a major concern for many Kabul citizens.⁵⁴¹ Foreigners and wealthy Afghans are indicated as the main targets.⁵⁴² Several sources report on an ineffective police response to Kabul's rapidly expanding crime scene.⁵⁴³ According to Foschini, there is 'a *modus vivendi* between police and criminals' in many city neighbourhoods, with powerful and deeply-rooted (political) interests often resulting in impunity.⁵⁴⁴ Mid-July 2020, the 'Security Charter - Mobilizing the People in the Fight against Crime' program was launched by the Afghan government, intensifying operations against criminal gangs and armed robbers in the capital region.⁵⁴⁵

⁵²⁸ Osman, B., A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who Are the Most Likely Perpetrators?, AAN, 7 June 2017, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#); Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 23

⁵²⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2019, [url](#), p. 99; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 90-91

⁵³⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 13, 58

⁵³¹ USDOD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 October - 31 December 2019, 19 February 2020, [url](#), p. 11

⁵³² Tolonews, Criminal Networks Have Political Support: Andarabi, 12 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵³³ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵³⁴ Tolonews, 4 Members of One Family Killed in Kabul, 19 January 2020, [url](#)

⁵³⁵ Tolonews, Crimes in Kabul's 'Most Secure Areas' Alarm Residents, 24 May 2020, [url](#)

⁵³⁶ Tolonews, University Professor Wounded as Armed Robbery Increases in Kabul, 8 January 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, KP Reporter Traumatized after Being Robbed at Gunpoint close to Kabul Police Station, 24 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵³⁷ Tolonews, Interior Ministry Pledges Crackdown on Drug Dealers, 7 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵³⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6-Member Gang of Kidnappers Busted in Kabul: NDS, 26 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Girl Rescued, 2 Suspected Abductors Held in Kabul, 14 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵³⁹ Tolonews, Concerns Rise on 'Increasing' Threats to Business Community, 23 April 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁰ Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 5-13, 15-16, 19-20, 22, 26; Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal Activities and the Police Response, AAN, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁴¹ Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁴² Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 26

⁵⁴³ NYT, They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime?, 8 February 2020, [url](#); Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal Activities and the Police Response, AAN, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁴ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal Activities & the Police Response, AAN, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁵ Tolonews, Police Target Paghman Gang Accused of Robbing Kabul Residents, 17 July 2020, [url](#)

2.1.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.1.3.1 General

According to UNAMA, over half of all civilian casualties from suicide attacks in 2019 were counted in 15 such incidents in Kabul City.⁵⁴⁶ Afghan government departments and officials, the Afghan security forces and high-profile international institutions, both military and civil, were reported as the main targets for AGEs in Kabul City.⁵⁴⁷ UNAMA also expressed its concern on the targeting of judges and prosecutors, health care workers, aid workers and human rights defenders.⁵⁴⁸ Additionally, a pattern of intimidation and violence faced by media workers and telecommunication companies was reported.⁵⁴⁹

ACLED collected data on 142 violent events in Kabul City⁵⁵⁰ from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 49 were coded as ‘battles’, 71 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 22 as ‘violence against civilians’.⁵⁵¹

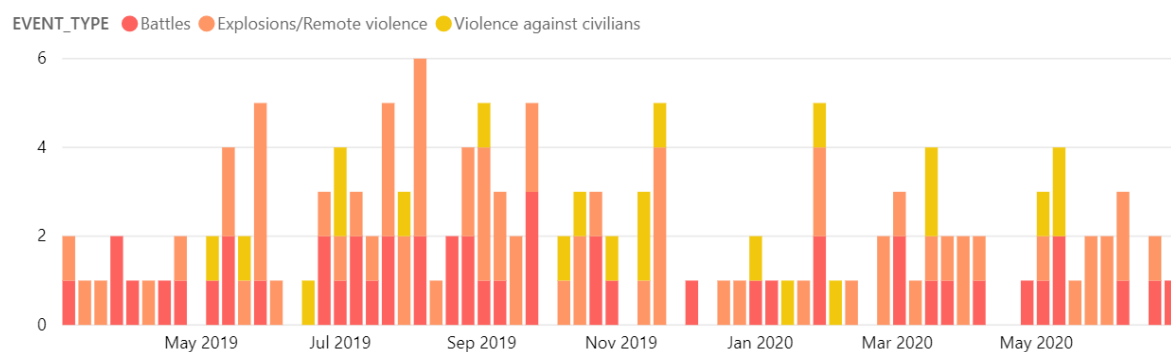


Figure 3. Kabul City - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data⁵⁵²

After an increase in the first half of 2018⁵⁵³, the number of high-profile suicide and complex attacks in Kabul started to decrease from the second half of 2018 and further into 2019.⁵⁵⁴ According to the UN Secretary General, this can be attributed to successful interdiction efforts and enhanced security measures by ANDSF forces in the capital.⁵⁵⁵ As in the whole of Afghanistan, violence in Kabul intensified during the third quarter of 2019⁵⁵⁶, with several suicide and complex attacks in the city in the months

⁵⁴⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 39

⁵⁴⁷ Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 22; Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 12, 24; USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2019, 24 June 2020, [url](#), p. 150

⁵⁴⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 7-8

⁵⁴⁹ HRW, Afghanistan's Media Self-Censors to Survive - Press Freedom at Risk in Deadliest Country for Journalists, 10 April 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Afghanistan: Deadliest Nation for Journalists, 20 January 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 45; Tolonews, 14 Cases of Violence against Journalists Recorded This Year, 17 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁰ ACLED does not differentiate between Kabul City and Kabul district.

⁵⁵¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul City; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁵⁵² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul City, [url](#)

⁵⁵³ Rutting, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's), October 2018, [url](#), pp. 4-5

⁵⁵⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](#), p. 25; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 14 June 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-6; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 16

⁵⁵⁵ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/73/902-S/2019/493, 14 June 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁵⁵⁶ NYT, Violence in Afghanistan Worsens as U.S.-Taliban Talks Plod On, 7 August 2019, [url](#)

of July, August and September.⁵⁵⁷ In the last quarter of 2019⁵⁵⁸, as well as in the first months of 2020⁵⁵⁹ fewer attacks were carried out in the capital. Since the second quarter of 2020, violence has reportedly increased again.⁵⁶⁰ In June 2020, Tolonews reported on 30 magnetic IED and roadside bomb blasts in the Kabul City area between 20 March and 31 May 2020.⁵⁶¹

Examples of suicide and complex attacks carried out in Kabul City during the reporting period included: an ISKP-claimed suicide attack and subsequent siege targeting the Ministry of Communication in April 2019, causing more than seven casualties⁵⁶²; a Taliban-claimed suicide attack against NGO Counterpart International in May 2019, killing 8 civilians and injuring 27⁵⁶³; a Taliban-claimed complex attack on the logistics and engineering department of the Ministry of Defence in July 2019, causing a large impact on surrounding houses, businesses and schools, resulting in 151 civilian casualties⁵⁶⁴; an unclaimed attack near the gates of Kabul University, in July 2019, resulting in more than 40 casualties⁵⁶⁵; an ISKP-claimed suicide bombing of a bus with employees from the Ministry of Petroleum and Mines, also in July 2019, killing at least 11 and wounding dozens⁵⁶⁶; a Taliban-claimed suicide bombing targeting the Green Village compound in the east of the city in September 2019, resulting in at least 16 people killed and injuring more than 100⁵⁶⁷; an unclaimed attack targeting the maternity ward of an MSF hospital in the Hazara populated Dasht-e Barchi neighbourhood, in May 2020, killing 24 people and wounding another 23⁵⁶⁸.

According to analyst Borhan Osman, 'high-profile attacks have become less frequent as the insurgents have shifted toward targeted assassinations'.⁵⁶⁹ An increase in targeted killings has been reported in Kabul City⁵⁷⁰, with government officials referring to the rising fear of Kabul becoming like other Afghan cities, such as Kandahar in the south, where a decrease in large-scale attacks has been replaced by a sustained rise in targeted killings.⁵⁷¹ Shootings by assassins riding on motorcycles, magnetic VBIEDs and remote IEDs are described as the tactics most often used for targeted killings.⁵⁷² In May 2019, political advisor and former TV journalist Mina Mangal was assassinated by unknown assailants in PD 8.⁵⁷³ In separate attacks in July and November 2019, four prosecutors and one judge were killed

⁵⁵⁷ USDOD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 July - 30 September 2019, 20 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 13-14; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/74/582-S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁵⁸ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 25; USDOD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 October - 31 December 2019, 19 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12

⁵⁵⁹ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/74/753-S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁵⁶⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020 (updated 25 June 2020), [url](#); UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/74/897-S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-6; Reporterly, EU Calls for Immediate Ceasefire as Violence Rises in Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁶¹ Tolonews, 30 Blasts in Kabul in Over 2 Months, 2 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁶² Guardian (The), At Least Seven Dead as Attackers Storm Afghan Ministry Building, 20 April 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁶³ NYT, Taliban Attack Aid Group Office in Kabul, in Setback to U.S. Peace Talks, 8 May 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 27

⁵⁶⁴ RFE/RL, Six Killed, More Than 115 Hurt As Powerful Blast Rocks Kabul, 1 July 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 27

⁵⁶⁵ NYT, Suicide Bombing at University Kills 10 As Violence Surges in Afghanistan, 19 July 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Women, Child among 11 Killed in Kabul Attack, 25 July 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁷ Guardian (The), Blast Hits Kabul after Briefing on US-Taliban Deal to Withdraw 5,000 Troops, 3 September 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁸ NYT, From Maternity Ward to Cemetery, a Morning of Murder in Afghanistan, 12 May 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: Attacks on Healthcare during the Covid-19 Pandemic, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 12-13

⁵⁶⁹ Osman, B., Intensifying Violence Dulls Afghans' Hopes for Peace, International Crisis Group, 5 July 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁰ Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 17 May 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁷¹ NYT, American Aid Worker for U.N. Is Killed in Afghan Capital, 25 November 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁷² NYT, American Aid Worker for U.N. Is Killed in Afghan Capital, 25 November 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 44

⁵⁷³ Al Jazeera, Afghan Parliament Advisor and Former Journalist Killed in Kabul, 11 May 2019, [url](#)

and injured in different city districts.⁵⁷⁴ In August 2019⁵⁷⁵ and in May 2020⁵⁷⁶, an ISKP-claimed roadside IED blast targeted two minibuses from private TV station Khurshid, resulting in 4 deaths and 10 people injured. In October-November 2019, the district chief of Jaghatu district (Wardak province)⁵⁷⁷, a high school principal⁵⁷⁸, an employee of the Ministry of Finance⁵⁷⁹, the Badghis provincial police chief⁵⁸⁰ and an intelligence agent⁵⁸¹ were gunned down in different areas of Kabul city. Also in November 2019, a grenade attack targeted a UN vehicle in PD 9, killing a foreign UN worker and wounding several civilians.⁵⁸² In March 2020, a Logar provincial council member was killed by unknown gunmen in PD 8⁵⁸³, the female mayor of Wardak province was attacked by unknown gunmen in PD 5⁵⁸⁴ and the female head of the NDS Gender Department died in a magnetic IED blast attached to her vehicle⁵⁸⁵. In June 2020, the governor for Nuristan province survived an attack by unknown gunmen on his convoy⁵⁸⁶ and an AIHRC employee and her driver were killed in an IED explosion targeting their vehicle⁵⁸⁷.

Several attacks in Kabul City in 2019 and 2020 were directed against the Afghan security forces. For example: a Taliban-claimed attack on a police checkpoint in PD 7 in May 2019, causing several ANP casualties⁵⁸⁸; two attacks targeting the Marshal Fahim Military University in PD 5 in May 2019⁵⁸⁹ and in February 2020⁵⁹⁰, causing more than a dozen casualties each; a Taliban-claimed car bombing targeting the police station of PD 6 in August 2019, killing at least 14 people and injuring 100 or more⁵⁹¹; a Taliban-claimed VBIED attack in September 2019 targeting an ANDSF checkpoint in a fortified area near the Green Zone, killing at least 10 civilians, 2 foreign troop members and injuring more than 40 people⁵⁹²; a Taliban-claimed suicide car bomb targeting the Chaharasyab Afghan Special Forces base on the outskirts of the capital, also in September 2019, causing several ANA casualties⁵⁹³; the shooting of several policemen by unidentified gunmen near Dehmazang Square in June 2020⁵⁹⁴; and a roadside bomb targeting a police vehicle in PD 11 in July 2020.⁵⁹⁵ Afghan officials, cited by NYT, pointed out that attacks on military targets in the city often result in a significant number of civilian casualties.⁵⁹⁶

In contrast to previous years, UNAMA documented a 35 % decrease in civilian casualties from sectarian-motivated attacks (mainly attributed to ISKP) in 2019.⁵⁹⁷ The single most deadly incident documented by UNAMA in 2019 was an ISKP-claimed suicide attack on the Dubai City Wedding Hall in

⁵⁷⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Maidan Wardak Judge Gunned Down in Kabul, 2 July 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 Prosecutor Killed, Another Wounded in Kabul, 6 July 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Two Federal Prosecutors Shot and Killed Near Kabul, 16 November 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁵ Tolonews, Explosion Targets Media Workers in Kabul, Kills Two, 4 August 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 45

⁵⁷⁶ RFE/RL, Islamic State Claims Blast That Killed Afghan Journalist, Technician, 31 May 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Jaghatu District Chief Gunned Down in Kabul, 13 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, School Principal Gunned Down in Kabul, 14 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ministry Official Gunned Down in Kabul, 17 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Badghis Police Chief Gunned Down in Kabul, 24 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁸¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Intelligence Agent Gunned Down in front of Kardan University, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁸² Al Jazeera, Blast Targets UN Vehicle in Afghanistan Killing One Foreigner, 24 November 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁸³ Tolonews, Logar Provincial Council Member Killed in Kabul, 8 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁴ Tolonews, Afghan Female Mayor Attacked in Kabul, 22 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁵ Tolonews, Female Head of NDS Gender Dept Dies in Kabul, 31 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁶ Tolonews, Nuristan Governor Survives Gunmen Attack in Kabul, 21 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁷ NYT, Another Young Leader Taken. Afghans Ask: How Many More?, 29 June 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2020: 1 January - 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 11

⁵⁸⁸ Al Jazeera, Gunmen Target Policemen in Deadly Kabul Checkpoint Attack, 20 May 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁹ Al Jazeera, Suicide Bomber Targets Afghan Military Training Centre in Kabul, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁰ Guardian (The), At Least 5 Dead in Suicide Attack on Kabul Military Academy, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 Killed, 146 Wounded in Kabul Bombing, 7 August 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁹² BBC News, Afghanistan Violence: Car Bomb Attack in Kabul Kills 10, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁹³ Al Jazeera, Taliban Suicide Attack in Kabul Kills Afghan Troops, 12 September 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁴ Tolonews, Gunmen Kill Policeman, Wound 2 More in Kabul, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁵ Tolonews, Blast Hits Police Vehicle in Kabul City, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁶ NYT, Violence in Afghanistan Worsens as U.S.-Taliban Talks Plod On, 7 August 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 47

PD 6 in August. The ceremony was mainly attended by Shi'a Muslims, resulting in 234 civilian casualties.⁵⁹⁸ In March 2020, ISKP claimed another sectarian-motivated attack in the capital: two gunmen opened fire on a ceremony commemorating the murder of ethnic Hazara leader Abdul Ali Mazari, causing more than a hundred civilian casualties.⁵⁹⁹ Since the second half of 2018, Hazara residents in western Kabul have reportedly been seeking to arm themselves, taking over responsibility for security in their areas.⁶⁰⁰

In 2019, UNAMA documented a 48 % decrease in civilian casualties from attacks targeting places of worship and religious leaders.⁶⁰¹ Several such attacks were reported in Kabul City. In May 2019, a Taliban-attributed IED explosion inside the Al-Taqwa mosque killed 3 civilians, including well-known religious leader Mauwlawi Rayhan, and wounded 34 people.⁶⁰² Also in May 2019, unknown gunmen shot and killed Mauwlawi Kamawal, a prominent religious and academic scholar who had called on anti-government forces to stop waging war.⁶⁰³ According to NYT reporters, these kinds of attacks on religious leaders reflect an enduring Taliban strategy, targeting people with religious influence in order to 'exert their power far from the battlefield and mute those who could question their legitimacy'.⁶⁰⁴ At the end of March 2020, ISKP gunmen stormed a Sikh temple and housing complex in the Shorbazar area, taking 80 people hostage⁶⁰⁵, killing 26 and injuring 11 more in an hours' long siege. Referring to this incident, UNAMA reported on an increase in civilian deaths from intentional targeting of civilians during the first quarter of 2020, as compared to 2019.⁶⁰⁶ In May 2020, a prayer leader was shot by unidentified gunmen in his mosque in PD 6.⁶⁰⁷ In June 2020, two explosions inside the Wazir Akbar Khan mosque in the city's Green Zone and inside the Sher Shah Suri mosque in Kart-e Char resulted in the death of two prayer leaders and several civilians.⁶⁰⁸

A general low interest in voting was reported in Kabul for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019⁶⁰⁹, just over a fifth of registered voters actually voted in the capital.⁶¹⁰ The deadliest election-related incident recorded in Kabul was an unclaimed complex attack targeting vice-presidential candidate Amrullah Saleh's office of the Green Trend political party in July 2019, causing 71 civilian casualties.⁶¹¹ The UN Secretary General reported a high tempo of small-scale attacks to prevent or disrupt the 2019 electoral process, with the highest number of security incidents on election day in Kunduz and Kabul City.⁶¹² According to UNAMA, however, no mass-casualty incidents were recorded on 28 September.⁶¹³ The Taliban reportedly warned students and teachers not to work as

⁵⁹⁸ NYT, 63 Killed as Explosion Turns Kabul Wedding Into Carnage, 17 August 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 20, 47-48

⁵⁹⁹ RFE/RL, Dozens Killed in Kabul Attack Claimed by Islamic State, 6 March 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁰⁰ RFE/RL, Under Threat, Kabul's Hazara Make Call to Arms, 20 September 2018, [url](#); Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 24

⁶⁰¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 46

⁶⁰² NYT, Bombing at Afghan Mosque Kills Popular Religious Scholar, 24 May 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 47

⁶⁰³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Defence Counsel Association Member Shot Dead in Kabul, 26 May 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁴ NYT, Bombing at Afghan Mosque Kills Popular Religious Scholar, 24 May 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁵ Al Jazeera, Gunmen Storm Sikh Religious Complex in Kabul, Many Feared Trapped, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Prayer Leader Gunned Down in Kabul, Say Police, 10 May 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁸ Tolonews, Afghans on Mosque Attack: 'Security Too Weak', 12 June 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰⁹ Adili, A. Y. et al., Afghanistan's Election 2019 (10): What to Watch Out for on Election Day?, AAN, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

⁶¹⁰ Adili, A. Y., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (24): Disputed Recount, Threats Not to Accept the Results and Some Interesting New Data, AAN, 21 November 2019, [url](#)

⁶¹¹ Guardian (The), Kabul Attack: 20 Killed, 50 Injured in Bombing and Gun Battle at Politician's Office, 29 July 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁶¹² UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/74/582-S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁶¹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#), p. 1

polling site staff through ‘night letters’ in some neighbourhoods in Kabul.⁶¹⁴ In March 2020, several ISKP-claimed rockets hit the sites where both President Ashraf Ghani and his rival Dr Abdullah Abdullah took the oath of office as president.⁶¹⁵

Since autumn 2018, ANDSF forces have begun a concerted effort to dismantle AGE groups active in and around the Kabul metropolitan area⁶¹⁶ with a new Command of the Joint Forces established in June 2020.⁶¹⁷ Examples of such military operations included: the arrest of six ISKP media activists in April 2019⁶¹⁸; the arrest of six ISKP members, allegedly involved in kidnappings, transferring munition and relocating of militants to Nangarhar, in June 2019⁶¹⁹, the detainment of four ISKP operatives, including a lecturer and graduates from Kabul university, in July 2019⁶²⁰; a raid on three ISKP cells in PDs 8, 11 and 15 in August 2019, resulting in the arrest and killing of several ISKP members⁶²¹; the arrest of nine ISKP sympathisers, providing financial support to the insurgence group, in February 2020⁶²²; several raids on ISKP and Haqqani hideouts in PDs 8 and 11 in May 2020, resulting in the arrest of three prominent ISKP figures, including a region leader, and the killing of several other militants⁶²³; and the arrest of two ISKP-affiliates, allegedly planning attacks on a hospital and media outlet in the city, in July 2020.⁶²⁴

2.1.3.2 Displacement

According to UNOCHA assessments, no conflict-induced displacement was reported from Kabul district⁶²⁵ between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, while during that same period Kabul district received 4 062 conflict-induced IDPs. The IDPs arriving in Kabul district came from a range of different provinces, such as Badakhshan, Baghlan, Bamyán, Balkh, Daykundi, Faryab, Ghazni, Jawzjan, Kapisa, Kunar, Kunduz, Laghman, Logar, Nangarhar, Samangan, Sar-e Pul, Takhar and Wardak. The largest group came from Kunar province (679) (mostly from Chapadara district) in the first half of 2019 and from Baghlan province (651) (mostly from Dahan-e Ghorī district) throughout the whole reporting period.⁶²⁶ Mid-March 2019, UNOCHA recorded a peak of 140 IDPs coming from Mardyan district in Jawzjan province. In the beginning of June 2019, UNOCHA registered a peak of 133 IDPs coming from Khwaja Umari district in Ghazni province, after the district was recaptured from AGEs.⁶²⁷ The IDPs who have so far arrived in Kabul district in 2020 are from the provinces of Nangarhar, Kunduz, Logar and Baghlan, as well as a peak of 336 individuals from the region of the central highlands (provinces Bamyán and Daykundi) in January and February 2020.⁶²⁸

⁶¹⁴ Adili, A. Y. et al., Afghanistan’s Election 2019 (9): Presidential Poll Primer, AAN, 25 September 2019, [url](#)

⁶¹⁵ NYT, Ghani Takes the Oath of Afghan President. His Rival Does, Too, 9 March 2020, [url](#)

⁶¹⁶ NYT, In Chaotic Afghan Capital, Crackdown on Crime is Turning Heads, 16 January 2019, [url](#); UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 18-19; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 1

⁶¹⁷ Khaama Press, Command Joint Forces Established to Root Out Terror Cells, Criminal Gangs in Kabul, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

⁶¹⁸ Khaama Press, 6 ISIS Media Activists Arrested in Kabul City, 4 April 2019, [url](#)

⁶¹⁹ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Arrest Six Daesh Members in Kabul, 9 June 2019, [url](#)

⁶²⁰ VoA, Afghan University Teacher, Students Among IS Operatives Arrested in Kabul, 8 July 2019, [url](#)

⁶²¹ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Raid Militants Hideouts in Kabul, 7 August 2019, [url](#)

⁶²² Khaama Press, NDS Forces Arrest 9 ISIS Sympathisers from a Landmark Mall in Kabul City, 12 February 2020, [url](#)

⁶²³ BBC News, IS Regional Leader Sheikh Khorasani 'Arrested in Afghanistan', 11 May 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 'Key' Daesh Leaders Arrested in Kabul: NDS, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

⁶²⁴ Tolonews, NDS Prevents Attacks Targeting Media Outlet, Hospital in Kabul, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

⁶²⁵ UNOCHA does not differentiate between Kabul City and Kabul district.

⁶²⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

⁶²⁷ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kabul - Meeting Summary, 25 June 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#)

⁶²⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

According to AAN analyst Foschini, 'more than half of Kabul's residents were not born there.'⁶²⁹ Based on data from the first half of 2019, IOM ranked Kabul district at the sixth place of the top 25 districts hosting most returnees and IDPs.⁶³⁰ The total number of IDPs in Kabul is not known, as movement to and within the city is fluid and many return regularly to their area of origin during more peaceful periods.⁶³¹ In February 2019, news agency Reuters reported that an estimated 100 000 displaced people have joined Kabul's urban sprawl.⁶³² There are different categories of IDPs in the city: (1) those fleeing armed conflict and insecurity, (2) returnees who could not return to their area of origin and live in secondary displacement, (3) those displaced from rural areas because of natural disasters, localized conflicts or a shortage of work, essential services and food, and (4) migratory groups/nomads such as Kuchis and Jogis residing in the city because conflict disrupted their migration patterns and livelihood or because of increasing impoverishment.⁶³³

IDPs in Kabul often settle in areas at the outskirts of the city, such as Bagrami and PDs 8, 12, 13, 16 and 21⁶³⁴, often mingling with other vulnerable groups such as the urban poor, returnees and economic migrants. The lack of adequate land and affordable housing in the urban area forces most new and protracted IDPs in Kabul to reside in tents, mud brick and tarpaulin shelters in one of the more than 55 informal and illegal settlements around the city. These are often referred to as '(Kabul) Informal Settlements', ISETs or KIS, varying in size from dozens to hundreds of dwellings and including some of the poorest and most vulnerable households in the city.⁶³⁵ In August 2019, news agency Al Jazeera reported on growing frustration among residents of Kabul's IDP settlements, stemming from a steadily deteriorating situation.⁶³⁶ The IDPs arriving and residing in Kabul reportedly add pressure on the community, basic services and social infrastructure, strongly affecting the absorption capacity of the city.⁶³⁷ Afghanistan's capital has been facing a severe water shortage for some years now, seriously affecting already vulnerable groups like displaced people.⁶³⁸ According to UNOCHA, this could be a potential source of future community tension.⁶³⁹

With limited job opportunities, few or no social protection nets, poor shelter/housing conditions, impeded access to education and healthcare and the continuous fear of eviction, displaced families in the KIS-sites face precarious living conditions and increased protection risks in their daily life. They are often forced into secondary displacement and negative coping strategies like child labour, drug use/addiction, early marriage and reducing quantity and quality of food.⁶⁴⁰ In May 2019, inhabitants

⁶²⁹ Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

⁶³⁰ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results Round 8 March-June 2019, 30 September 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 6

⁶³¹ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 8; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 3; Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#)

⁶³² Reuters, Life in Kabul's Squatter Camps Highlights Challenge for Any Afghan Peace, 15 February 2019, [url](#)

⁶³³ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), p. 7

⁶³⁴ Protection Cluster Afghanistan, Central Region Update, May 2017, 17 June 2017, [url](#), p. 1; EU Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection & ERM, IDP's Needs Assessment in Kabul Province, 25 February 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁶³⁵ Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, [url](#), pp. 7-8; Bjelica, J., Afghanistan's Returning Refugees: Why Are So Many Still Landless?, AAN, 29 March 2016, [url](#); NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 25, 53; Guardian (The), Pressure Builds in 'Powderkeg' Kabul as Refugees Return Home, 15 March 2018, [url](#); NRC and IDMC, Stuck in the Mud: Urban Displacement and Tenure Security in Kabul's Informal Settlements, 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁶³⁶ Al Jazeera, 'Poor People's Eid': How Kabul IDPs Welcomed Muslim Celebration, 12 August 2019, [url](#)

⁶³⁷ UNHCR, UNHCR's Support Towards the Implementation of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees: Enhancing Resilience and Co-Existence Through Greater Responsibility Sharing 2018-2019, October 2018, [url](#), pp. 5, 21-22; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2019, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15; IDMC, A Different Kind of Pressure. The Cumulative Effects of Displacement and Return in Afghanistan, January 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁶³⁸ Kazemi, S. R., Blue Gold: The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, [url](#); New Humanitarian (The), As Afghanistan's Capital Grows, Its Residents Scramble for Clean Water, 19 February 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, War, Drought, Diplomatic Rifts Deepen Afghanistan's Water Crisis, 5 May 2019, [url](#)

⁶³⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 43

⁶⁴⁰ Reuters, Life in Kabul's Squatter Camps Highlights Challenge for Any Afghan Peace, 15 February 2019, [url](#); NRC and IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement - Grid 2019, May 2019, [url](#), pp. 35, 94; NRC and IDMC, Stuck in the Mud: Urban Displacement and Tenure Security in Kabul's Informal Settlements, 2019, [url](#), pp. 2-4, 10-12, 14-16; Al Jazeera, Life in

from several of Kabul's informal settlements reported on signs of change, with their living areas slowly becoming more developed and organised. The Afghan Land Authority Arazi, in cooperation with UN Habitat, has started a registration project of Kabul's ISETs⁶⁴¹, adding to a growing database of city areas being formalised.⁶⁴²

Apart from internal displacement due to conflict, Kabul City sees large flows of Afghan refugees returning from neighbouring countries (Pakistan and Iran) or from Turkey (after deportation from Europe)⁶⁴³ putting further strain on the city's services and its reintegration capacity.⁶⁴⁴ Many returnees end up in the capital because of relatively higher security than in their regions of origin and because of expectations of more job opportunities, better support services and prospects of social acceptance.⁶⁴⁵ Few tensions are reported, but an increased pressure on local resources, jobs, services, and facilities that feeds fear among both returnees and host communities is outlined by several sources.⁶⁴⁶ Most returnees in Kabul City depend on relatives for accommodation and other in-kind support.⁶⁴⁷ The importance of social networks is reported as vital for returnees. When originally not from Kabul and without a safety net or extended family in the capital, returnees face difficulties supporting themselves, finding jobs or renting accommodation. Hazara returnees coming to Kabul can generally count on better support, through a range of sophisticated social networks within their well-organised and cohesive community.⁶⁴⁸ Several sources report on the risk of recruitment of IDPs or inhabitants of informal settlements in Kabul by AGEs⁶⁴⁹ and the possible radicalisation of returnees and people deported from Europe.⁶⁵⁰

the City: Tackling Kabul's Urban Challenges, 11 July 2019, [url](#); Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 8

⁶⁴¹ According to an expert of Afghanistan, interviewed by the Finnish Immigration Service while on Fact Finding Mission in Kabul in April 2019. Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 14

⁶⁴² Guardian (The), 'There is Less Fear': Restoration of Kabul Repairs the Ravages of War, 13 May 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁴³ IOM interviewed by the Finnish Immigration Service while on Fact Finding Mission in Kabul in April 2019. Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), p. 11; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 82

⁶⁴⁴ IOM and UNHCR, Returns to Afghanistan 2018 - Joint IOM-UNHCR Summary Report, 25 June 2019, [url](#), p. 6; Foschini, F., Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today's Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7; NYT, Fresh from Iran's Coronavirus Zone, Now Moving across Afghanistan, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁵ MMC, Distant Dreams. Understanding the Aspirations of Afghan Returnees, January 2019, [url](#), p. 31; Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan Returnees - 2018, 14 May 2019, [url](#), p. 106; WBG and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, June 2019, [url](#), pp. 6, 16, 22

⁶⁴⁶ Oxfam, Returning to Fragility. Exploring the Link Between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, [url](#), pp. 23-24; Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan Returnees - 2018, 14 May 2019, [url](#), p. 97; WBG and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, June 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁴⁷ MMC, Distant Dreams. Understanding the Aspirations of Afghan Returnees, January 2019, [url](#), pp. 33, 39-40

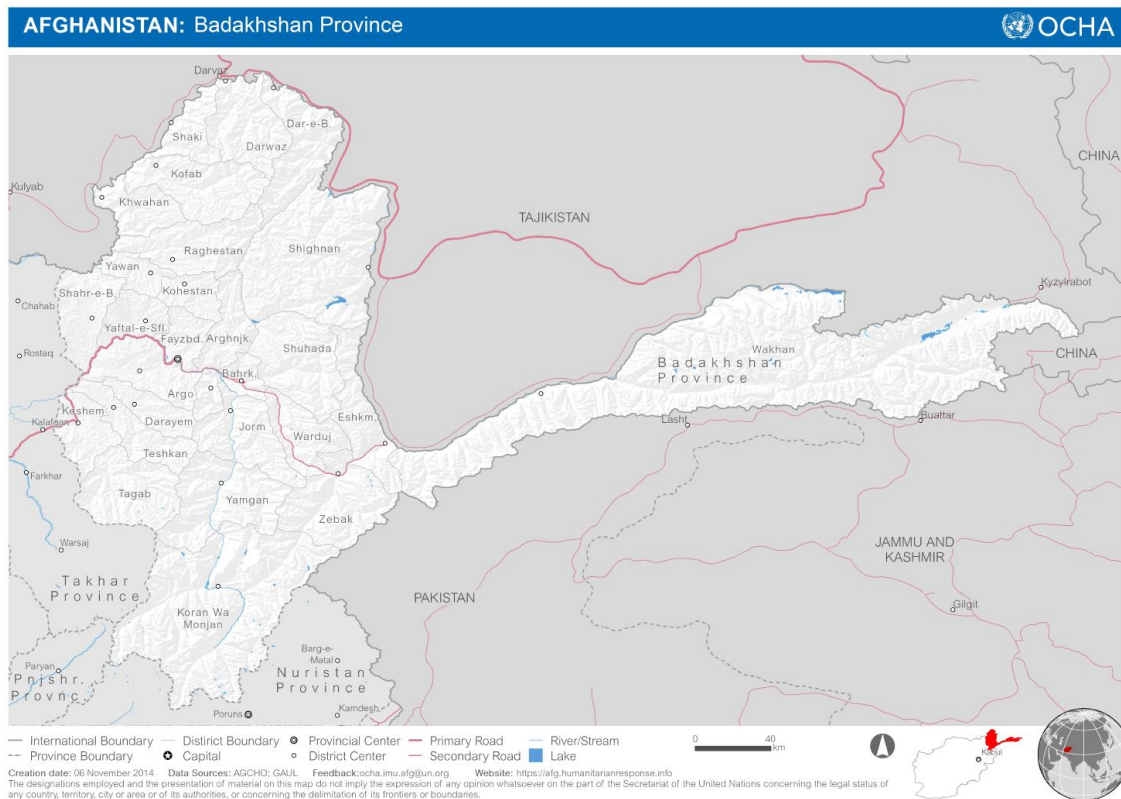
⁶⁴⁸ Sources cited by the Finnish Immigration Service. Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 25-26

⁶⁴⁹ Guardian (The), 'There is Less Fear': Restoration of Kabul Repairs the Ravages of War, 13 May 2019, [url](#); NRC and ACAPS, Displacement and Access in Afghanistan: Scenarios, June 2019, [url](#), p. 11; Al Jazeera, 'Poor People's Eid': How Kabul IDPs Welcomed Muslim Celebration, 12 August 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁰ DW, Deported Afghans at Risk of Radicalization: Study, 26 November 2019, [url](#)

2.2 Badakhshan

2.2.1 General description of the province



Map 2: Afghanistan – Badakhshan province, source: UNOCHA⁶⁵¹

Badakhshan province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Takhar to the west, Panjshir to the south-west and Nuristan to the south and south-east and international borders with Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan.⁶⁵² Badakhshan province is divided into the following administrative units: Arghanjkhwah, Argo, Baharak, Darayem, Darwaz (Marmay), Darwaz-e-Balla (Nesay), Eshkshmesh, Fayzabad, Jorm, Keshem, Khash, Khwahan, Kofab, Kohestan, Koran wa Munjan, Raghestan, Shar-e-Buzorg, Shignan, Shaki, Shuhada, Tagab, Teshkan, Wakhan, Warduj, Yaftal-e-Sufla, Yamgan (Girwan), Yawan, and Zebak.⁶⁵³ Most of the province is mountainous. The provincial capital is Fayzabad.⁶⁵⁴

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, formerly Central Statistics Organization), the province has a population of 1 054 087, 77 154 of whom live in the provincial capital, Fayzabad.⁶⁵⁵ The main ethnic groups in the province are Tajiks and Uzbeks.⁶⁵⁶

As of July 2020, scheduled passenger services between Fayzabad and Kabul were provided.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Badakhshan Province- District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

⁶⁵² UNOCHA, Reference Map Badakhshan Province, 19 February 2014, [url](#)

⁶⁵³ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Badakhshan, 2020, [url](#); NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 26-27

⁶⁵⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Badakhshan province, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁵⁵ NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 26

⁶⁵⁶ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Provincial Profile – Badakhshan, n.d., [url](#); Ali O., Ruttig Th., Elections 2014 (22): How disenchantment with General Dostum split the Uzbek vote bank, AAN, 22 May 2014, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁷ KamAir, Route Map, n.d., [url](#)

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Badakhshan is a region for poppy cultivation in northern Afghanistan.⁶⁵⁸ It is also a transit zone for drug trafficking.⁶⁵⁹ The province is rich in mineral resources.⁶⁶⁰ The drug trafficking combined with the presence of lapis lazuli and gold mines fuels, finances and adds complexity to the security situation.⁶⁶¹ For example the Taliban's fight for control of Yamgan was linked to the district's proximity to Koran wa Munjan district, where a large lapis lazuli mine is located.⁶⁶² They managed to capture it in July 2019.⁶⁶³

2.2.2 Conflict background and actors in Badakhshan

Between 1996 and 2001, Badakhshan was among the few areas in Afghanistan remaining beyond Taliban control. An AAN report published in 2017 highlighted that the Taliban had become increasingly successful in Badakhshan since 2015, partly because of a changed recruitment policy which is – contrary to the Taliban strategy of the 1990s – more affirmative towards local non-Pashtuns, in particular Tajiks. Another reason for the Taliban's successes in Badakhshan were political dynamics which have long been dominated by struggles between local powerbrokers.⁶⁶⁴

Due to the remoteness of the area, the Taliban have created bases for smuggling networks and financial operations in the north-east.⁶⁶⁵ As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Arghanjkhwah and Yamgan districts as 'Taliban-controlled', Fayzabad, Kofab, Shar-e-Buzorg, Wakhan, Yaftal-e-Sufla and Yawan districts as 'government-controlled' and the remaining districts in Badakhshan province as 'contested'.⁶⁶⁶

Besides local Taliban fighters, Tajik, Uzbek, Uyghur⁶⁶⁷, and to a lesser extent Russian and Turkmen nationals were reportedly fighting in several districts of the province in 2017⁶⁶⁸, and continued to be present in 2019 and 2020.⁶⁶⁹ According to a working paper by the NGO The Liaison Office and the Bonn International Center for Conversion, published in June 2017, foreign fighters and their families settled in Badakhshan as a result of a Pakistan Army operation in North Waziristan, Pakistan, in 2014.⁶⁷⁰ Reportedly, they were likely to belong to smaller anti-government armed groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Al Qaeda. Furthermore, foreign fighters such as the above mentioned Uyghurs are embedded within local Taliban structures, fighting alongside Afghan AGEs.⁶⁷¹ The same

⁶⁵⁸ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

⁶⁵⁹ AREU, Evolving Terrain: Opium Poppy Cultivation in Balkh and Badakhshan Provinces in 2013, February 2014, [url](#), p. 24; UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 15

⁶⁶⁰ Samuel Hall, Review of Country Strategy Badakhshan and Takhar, October 2010, [url](#), p. 6

⁶⁶¹ NYT, Captives or Defectors? Taliban Fighters Tell Conflicting Tales, 7 November 2019, [url](#); NYT, A Desperate Battle, and a Victory for Now, at a Remote Afghan Outpost, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁶² RFE/RL, Taliban Takes District Headquarters, Says It Will Not Negotiate With Afghan Government Team, 28 March 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁶³ Ruttig, T. and Van Bijlert, M., et. al., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (10): What to watch out for on election day, AAN, 26 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture lapis mine, 30 guards in Badakhshan, 16 July 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁴ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (1): A case study from Badakhshan, AAN, 3 January 2017, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁵ Washington Post (The), In Afghanistan's northeast, fears of a Taliban return, 19 October 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁶ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

⁶⁶⁷ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Increasing Presence In Remote Afghan Region Bordering China, 12 February 2018, [url](#); Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27

⁶⁶⁸ Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27

⁶⁶⁹ NYT, A Desperate Battle, and a Victory for Now, at a Remote Afghan Outpost, 26 September 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 2 Chechen militants killed, wounded in Badakhshan artillery strikes, 25 March 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Badakhshan Governor Claims Taliban Has Ties with Foreign Fighters, 10 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁰ Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27

⁶⁷¹ Callahan, T. and Marty, F.J., Tilting at Windmills: Dubious US claims of targeting Chinese Uyghur militants in Badakhshan, AAN, 19 March 2018, [url](#); Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27

source indicated that the Badakhshan Taliban are a comparatively heterogeneous movement, facilitating '[...] a hybridization of the local insurgency in the name of the Taliban'.⁶⁷² Afghanistan Analysts Network however also stated that '[...] reliably identifying and tracking foreign fighters is virtually impossible [...]. And 'determining those fighters' actual origins is equally difficult.'⁶⁷³ According to information submitted to the UN Security Council for its June 2019 report, in Afghanistan Central Asian groups were under the direct operational and financial control of the Taliban, with about 50 fighters of the Islamic Jihad Group in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces.⁶⁷⁴ According to the same report Al Qaeda was trying to strengthen its presence in Badakhshan, in particular in Shighnan district. Badakhshan was mentioned as one of the three provinces where most of the 240 officially reported Al Qaeda fighters operating in Afghanistan were located.⁶⁷⁵ The June 2019 UN report also mentioned 400 foreign fighters for the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), operating in Badakhshan⁶⁷⁶, mainly in Warduj and Raghestan districts, with financing based in the latter.⁶⁷⁷ The ministry of Defense confirmed the presence of ETIM in Afghanistan in December 2019 to the Afghan newspaper Etilaatroz, without specifying a region or the number of members. According to the Etilaatroz article the movement seems to be active in the north-east and in Badakhshan in particular. Both the provincial governor and the Taliban denied the independent presence of ETIM in Badakhshan or Afghanistan. While the governor claimed that Uyghurs operate under the Taliban umbrella, the Taliban themselves dismissed reports of ETIM activity in Afghanistan as propaganda, meant to cause distrust.⁶⁷⁸

A 2017 analysis of ISKP in Afghanistan indicates that ISKP presence was less intense in Badakhshan than in nearby Kunduz and Takhar provinces.⁶⁷⁹ A researcher for the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) mentioned small pockets of ISKP emerging in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces in August 2019.⁶⁸⁰ Screenshots of ISKP tweets claiming the killing of a militia leader and former mayor in Fayzabad on 1 September 2019 and an attack on pro-government forces in Jorm district in May 2020 were shared on Twitter.⁶⁸¹

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Badakhshan province is under the responsibility of the 217th ANA corps after ANA's 20th Division, previously under the ANA 209th Corps, was reassigned in April 2019 to become a new corps, the 217th Corps.⁶⁸² The 217th Corps has its headquarters in Kunduz.⁶⁸³ As of 30 April 2020, Badakhshan province was still included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part

⁶⁷² Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 27

⁶⁷³ Callahan, T. and Marty, F.J., Tilting at Windmills: Dubious US claims of targeting Chinese Uyghur militants in Badakhshan, AAN, 19 March 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁴ UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 18

⁶⁷⁵ UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 9

⁶⁷⁶ UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 19

⁶⁷⁷ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 21

⁶⁷⁸ Etilaatroz, جنگجویان اویغور در افغانستان؛ فعالیت زیر چتر طالبان، تهدید علیه چین [informal translation 'Uyghur fighters in Afghanistan: activity under the umbrella of Taliban, threat to China'], 14 December 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁹ Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), p. 26

⁶⁸⁰ National (The), ISIS recruitment is growing in Afghanistan as US and Taliban work for peace, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁸¹ Dr Drexludddin Khan Spiveyzei (@RisboLensky), [Twitter], posted on 3 September 2019, [url](#); FJ (@NatsecJeff), [Twitter], posted on 16 May 2020, [url](#); Intelligensia (@OSINT_313), [Twitter], posted on 16 May 2020, [url](#); Valle, R., [Twitter], posted on 16 May 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁸² SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 78

⁶⁸³ USDOD, Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Lead Inspector General Report To The United States Congress. April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019, 16 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.⁶⁸⁴

A November 2019 New York Times article points at the frequency of switching sides between the Taliban, other anti-government armed groups and the Afghan security forces in the remote province of Badakhshan, causing old local rivalries to intertwine with new loyalties.⁶⁸⁵

2.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.2.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 106 civilian casualties (48 deaths and 58 injured) in Badakhshan. This represents an increase of 68 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were air strikes, followed by ground engagements and targeted/deliberate killings.⁶⁸⁶ Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Badakhshan in the first half of 2020, reporting an increase in civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.⁶⁸⁷

ACLED collected data on 276 violent events in Badakhshan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 186 of which were coded as battles, 81 as explosions/remote violence and 9 as violence against civilians.⁶⁸⁸ Warduj stood out as the district where most incidents were reported with 54 violent events, followed by Jorm district with 40 violent events. No violent events were registered by ACLED in Eshkshmesh, Kofab, Shignan, Shaki and Wakhan districts.⁶⁸⁹

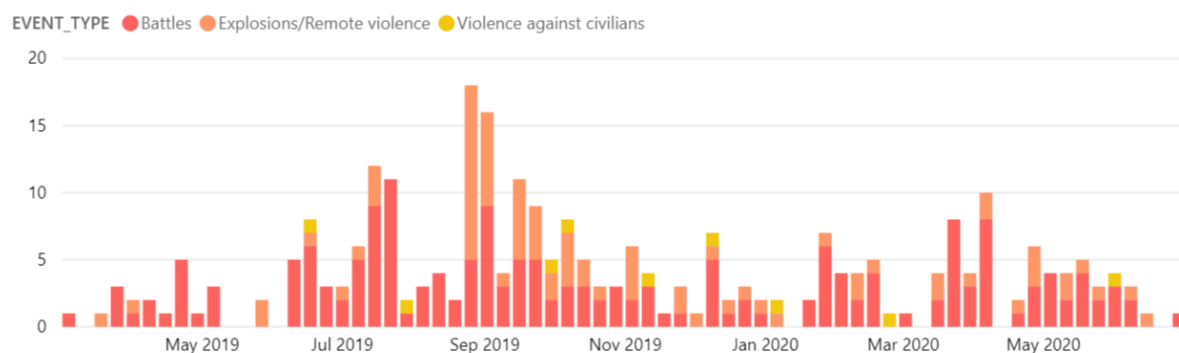


Figure 4. Badakhshan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data⁶⁹⁰

ACLED coded 68 % of the violent incidents in Badakhshan province as 'battles', mostly 'armed clashes', representing the most prevalent incident type in all of Badakhshan's districts, with the exception of

⁶⁸⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12; 50; USDOD, Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Lead Inspector General Report To The United States Congress. April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019, 16 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 27-28

⁶⁸⁵ NYT, Captives or Defectors? Taliban Fighters Tell Conflicting Tales, 7 November 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94. No UNAMA data on civilian casualties in Badakhshan province were available for the first half of 2020.

⁶⁸⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 72

⁶⁸⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁶⁸⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision Code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁶⁹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badakhshan, [url](#)

Warduj, Jorm and Kohestan districts.⁶⁹¹ The majority of those armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police, military or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or so-called Arbakis (the term 'Arbaki' is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias)⁶⁹² or attacks on military or police facilities such as checkpoints⁶⁹³, military bases⁶⁹⁴ and sometimes attacks on vehicles.⁶⁹⁵

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, such as the ones in the context of 'Operation Pamir 207' aimed at recapturing Warduj and Yamgan districts in the Summer of 2019⁶⁹⁶ or an operation in Jorm district in April 2020⁶⁹⁷ were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED. Most of the security operations in Badakhshan were carried out in September 2019 and April 2020.⁶⁹⁸ Some of these operations were backed by air strikes, for example in Warduj and Nesay districts in April 2020.⁶⁹⁹

During an attack in Arghanjkhwah district on 29 March 2019, the Taliban were able to capture the district, before government forces recaptured it on 2 April 2019.⁷⁰⁰ The Taliban attacked the centre of Jorm district on 14 April 2019⁷⁰¹, the centre of Shuhada district on 19 June 2019, Nesay district on 13 October and 2 November 2019 and the centre of Warduj district on 18 September 2019.⁷⁰² To put pressure on Taliban supply networks and finances, the security forces increased their operations in September and October 2019 in the north-east, with their main focus on Kunduz and Badakhshan.⁷⁰³ They were able to recapture three of Badakhshan's districts, two of which, Warduj and Yamgan, having been under Taliban control for about four years⁷⁰⁴, while Koran wa Munjan had been captured by the Taliban on 22 July 2019.⁷⁰⁵ On 7 September 2019, the security forces were also able to clear parts of

⁶⁹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁶⁹² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁹³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#); Xinhua, 2 soldiers, 14 militants killed in clashes in N. Afghanistan, 22 May 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁶ Ruttig, T. and Van Bijlert, M., et. al., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (10): What to watch out for on election day, AAN, 26 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); Clark K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁶⁹⁹ Afghanistan Times, Tens of rebels killed in Badakhshan, 11 April 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 27 Taliban killed in Badakhshan airstrikes: MoD, 11 April 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 29-April 4, 4 April 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Taliban Takes Control of District In Northeast Afghanistan Following Deadly Clashes, 30 March 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁰¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 12-18, 18 April 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁰² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 14-20, 20 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁰³ NYT, A Desperate Battle, and a Victory for Now, at a Remote Afghan Outpost, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁴ Xinhua, Afghan fighting gets intensified amid reported progress in U.S.-Taliban talks, 7 September 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Capture Key Afghan Districts Bordering Central Asia, 10 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces retake Warduj district after 3 years, 7 September 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Yumgan District Under Afghan Forces Control After Four Years, 9 September 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁵ Khaama Press, Taliban militants capture Kuran wa Munjan district of Badakhshan province, 22 July 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan forces recapture Kiran Wa Manjan district in Badakhshan province, 11 September 2019, [url](#); Tolonews,

an important road leading to Tajikistan.⁷⁰⁶ However Badakhshan was one of the Taliban's targets during their attacks in the north in March 2020. After the week of reduction in violence, which a local doctor said they used to prepare for their attacks⁷⁰⁷, the Taliban managed to take control again of Yamgan district⁷⁰⁸ and of some villages in Jorm district, inflicting casualties on Afghan security forces there.⁷⁰⁹

The majority of the 81 reported incidents of 'explosions/remote violence' registered by ACLED in Badakhshan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, were 'air/drone strikes'⁷¹⁰, representing 18 % of all violent incidents in Badakhshan province. Air strikes were mainly carried out in Warduj and Jorm districts. The majority of air strikes were carried out by Afghan forces, some were attributed to NATO forces.⁷¹¹ While those air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs⁷¹², some also caused civilian casualties, for example in Warduj district on 14 October 2019, when an air strike killed eight civilians, including children.⁷¹³ Incidents where the Taliban or unidentified armed groups used roadside bombs and IEDs to target Afghan and international security forces or government officials⁷¹⁴, represented 9 % of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Badakhshan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.⁷¹⁵ Some of these incidents caused civilian casualties, for example the ISKP-claimed killing of militia leader and former mayor Nazir in Fayzabad district on 1 September 2019⁷¹⁶ or in Kohestan district on 30 May 2020, when two shepherds were killed as a result of a roadside bomb detonating in front of a checkpoint.⁷¹⁷

Badakhshan's Kiran Wa Manjan District Retaken: MoD, 11 September 2019, [url](#); UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/582–S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁰⁶ NYT, A Desperate Battle, and a Victory for Now, at a Remote Afghan Outpost, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁷ 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](#)

⁷⁰⁸ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/897–S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 2, 18, 27

⁷⁰⁹ NYT, Taliban Attack Afghanistan Amid Growing Coronavirus Threat, 28 March 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Taliban Takes District Headquarters, Says It Will Not Negotiate With Afghan Government Team, 28 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 March to 29 March 2020), 1 April 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 March – 5 April 2020), 9 April 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Rampant insecurity wreaks havoc in Badakhshan, 6 April 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 bases fall 32 security personnel go missing, 28 March 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Yamgan district falls to Taliban after fierce fighting, 28 March 2020, [url](#)

⁷¹⁰ These do not include air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under 'battles'. For more information on ACLED's methodology, please consult the introduction.

⁷¹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁷¹² UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 10; Khaama Press, Airstrikes kill at least 40 Taliban militants in Badakhshan, 4 September 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, 12 Taliban Including Commander Killed in Badakhshan, 12 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 militants killed in Badakhshan airstrike, clash, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

⁷¹³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Civilians Killed In An Airstrike In Warduj, Badakhshan, 14 October 2019, [url](#)

⁷¹⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#); AP, Separate attacks kill 14 Afghan forces in Kabul, northeast, 6 June 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Uprising commander, ex-mayor killed in Faizabad blast, 1 September 2019, [url](#)

⁷¹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁷¹⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

⁷¹⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

Nine incidents categorised by ACLED as ‘violence against civilians’ included the killing of MoI officials⁷¹⁸, the father of a police commander⁷¹⁹ and a civilian accused of being a government spy⁷²⁰ by the Taliban or unidentified armed men. The Taliban killed four or five members of the same family in retaliation of the killing of two of their commanders⁷²¹ or on suspicion of being government spies.⁷²² Civilians were also killed in an attack, carried out by unidentified armed men on a mosque in Argo district in December 2019.⁷²³ Four civilians were killed for unknown reasons in a Taliban-controlled area in Arghanjkhwah district in June 2020.⁷²⁴ The Taliban accused government forces of killing civilians during attacks in Warduj district in October 2019 and January 2020 and in Fayzabad district in February 2020.⁷²⁵ In addition to the incidents registered by ACLED, UNAMA documented the beating and abduction of thirteen civilians in Warduj district on 30 May 2020. Seven were released in the following days while the other six were only released by 26 June 2020.⁷²⁶

There were reports from the north-eastern region, including from Badakhshan province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019.⁷²⁷ Due to conflict in Nesay district in January 2020 the main roads in some of the district’s villages were closed to the public prompting the government to plan cash distribution for food in those villages.⁷²⁸ Within the framework of its attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) registered the closure and reopening of a health facility in Badakhshan province in 2019.⁷²⁹

2.2.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 33 208 displaced by conflict from Badakhshan province, 97 % of whom were displaced within the province itself. The largest displacement occurred in Jorm district, mainly in August and September 2019, when conflict and clashes were reported in the Khustak valley.⁷³⁰ A large group was displaced within Warduj district in January 2020. Other large groups were displaced within Baharak district in August and September 2019, when military operations were carried out.⁷³¹ UNOCHA reported displacement from Koran wa Munjan district to other districts within Badakhshan province but also to other provinces such as Parwan or Panjshir in July and August 2019, when the Taliban took control of the district centre⁷³² and military operations followed.⁷³³ In the last days of June 2020 UNOCHA noted the ‘most significant

⁷¹⁸ Khaama Press, Taliban kills two MOI officials in Jurm district of Badakhshan, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

⁷¹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Badakhshan detective chief wounded, father killed, 3 October 2019, [url](#)

⁷²⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

⁷²¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, [url](#)

⁷²² Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban execute 5 civilians over cooperation with govt, 23 June 2019, [url](#)

⁷²³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 worshippers killed in Badakhshan gun attack, 12 December 2019, [url](#)

⁷²⁴ Ariana News, Taliban gunned down four civilians in Badakhshan: official, 2 June 2020, [url](#); Pasbanan, Four member of a family were killed in Badakhshan, 2 June 2020, [url](#)

⁷²⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁷²⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

⁷²⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, [url](#); Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 10; NYT, To Disrupt Elections, Taliban Turn to an Old Tactic: Destroying Cell Towers, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

⁷²⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 January - 12 January 2019), 15 January 2020, [url](#)

⁷²⁹ WHO, Afghanistan. Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019 [url](#)

⁷³⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 September 2019), 25 September 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 - 29 September 2019), 2 October 2019, [url](#)

⁷³¹ Tolonews, Large-Scale Military Operations Launched In Badakhshan, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

⁷³² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (29 July - 04 August 2019), 7 August 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 - 11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture Badakhshan’s Karan wa Menjan district, 22 July 2019, [url](#)

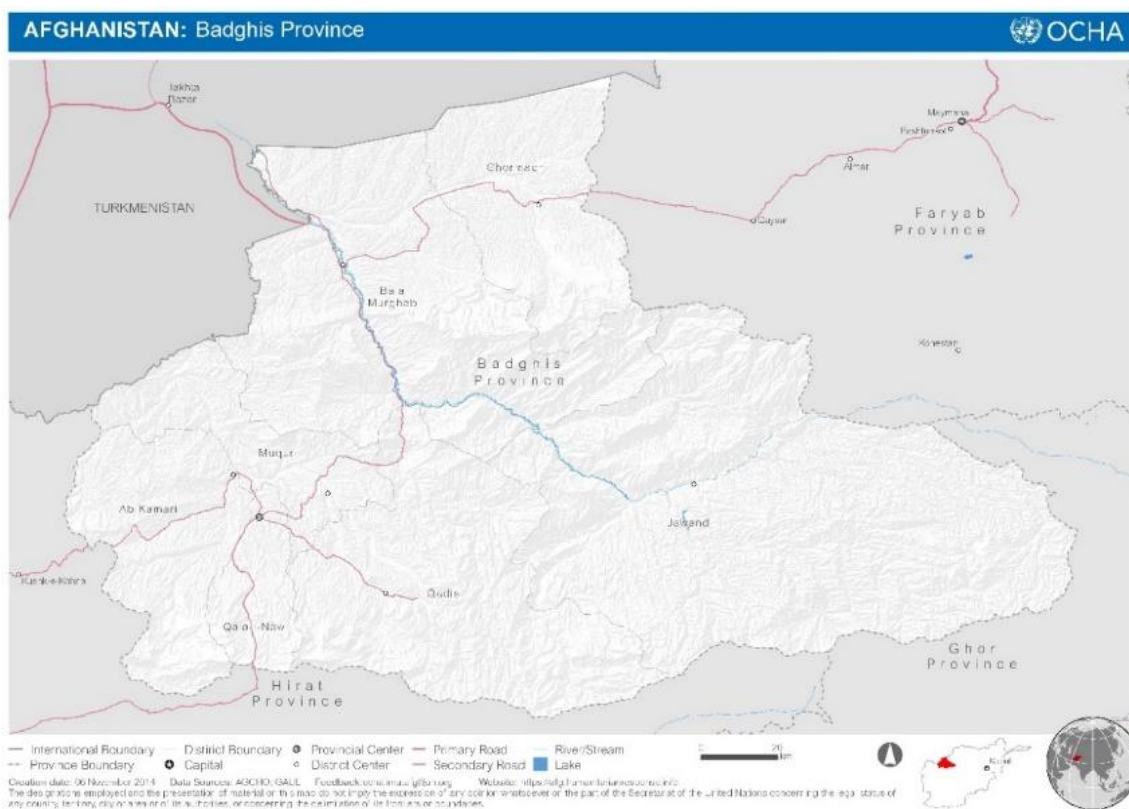
⁷³³ Tolonews, Large-Scale Military Operations Launched In Badakhshan, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

displacement since March 2020⁷³⁴ in three north-eastern provinces, including Badakhshan.⁷³⁴ No conflict-induced displacement was registered from over half of Badakhshan's districts, including Fayzabad.⁷³⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 32 277 persons displaced by conflict to Badakhshan province, all displaced within the province. While in Warduj and Jorm, displacement occurred within the respective districts, Fayzabad hosted 22 % and Baharak 19 % IDPs from various districts within Badakhshan province.⁷³⁶

2.3 Badghis

2.3.1 General description of the province



Map 3: Afghanistan – Badghis province, source: UNOCHA⁷³⁷

The province of Badghis is located in northwestern Afghanistan⁷³⁸, alongside the border with Turkmenistan.⁷³⁹ Badghis province is divided into the following administrative units: Ab Kamari, Murghab (Bala Murghab), Ghormach, Jawand, Muqur, Qadis, and Qala-i Naw. The provincial capital is

⁷³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 June – 28 June 2020), 1 July 2020, [url](#)

⁷³⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

⁷³⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

⁷³⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Badghis Province- District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

⁷³⁸ Khaama Press, 29 Taliban militants killed, wounded in separate incidents in Badghis province, 14 April 2020, [url](#)

⁷³⁹ RFERL, Officials: 25 elite commandos killed in clashes with Taliban, 17 July 2019, [url](#)

Qala-i Naw.⁷⁴⁰ The district of Ghormach reportedly became part of Faryab in 2017.⁷⁴¹ In August 2018, the Peshawar-based daily newspaper, the Frontier Post reported that Ghormach's administrative affairs would be shifted back to Badghis due to security reasons.⁷⁴² The administrative status of the district seems to be disputed. AAN cited sources claiming that the central government had already transferred Ghormach to Faryab 'temporarily' in 2007, while the governor of Faryab did not consider Ghormach to be part of Faryab in 2010.⁷⁴³ NSIA estimated the population of Badghis province for 2020-21 at 549 583.⁷⁴⁴ According to the Office of the President of Afghanistan, Badghis is inhabited mainly by Tajiks, Pashtuns, Uzbeks, and Turkmens.⁷⁴⁵

The roads of Badghis have been reported to be in bad condition and mostly unsafe because of insurgent and criminal activity.⁷⁴⁶ In January 2020, *Wolesi Jirga* (Lower House of the Afghan Parliament), approved two presidential decrees on obtaining USD 100 million loan for the construction of two roads: Kabul ring road, which will cost USD 70 million and the Armak-Qala-i Naw road in Badghis that will cost USD 30 million.⁷⁴⁷ The population relies entirely on rainfall for agriculture and drinking water and the food insecurity reached a crisis level. Drought⁷⁴⁸ and natural disasters made people in Badghis province vulnerable to recruitment by insurgents and militants due to the famine.⁷⁴⁹

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2018, opium poppy cultivation in Badghis province decreased by more than two thirds compared to 2017, mainly driven by drought⁷⁵⁰, but also because UNODC counted the district Ghormach, which is a major poppy cultivating district, as part of Faryab in 2018.⁷⁵¹ According to AAN, in 2019, opium-poppy cultivation in the four western provinces including in Badghis has decreased by 23 % compared to 2018.⁷⁵² On 23 June 2019, Afghan security forces reportedly seized a Taliban related truck loaded with drugs on the Herat-Torghondi Highway, which came from Bala Murghab district of Badghis province.⁷⁵³

2.3.2 Conflict background and actors in Badghis

According to the provincial profile of Badghis by AAN, Badghis was the first province of northern Afghanistan to be seized by the Taliban in late 1996.⁷⁵⁴ After the fall of the Taliban, several influential warlords ruled Badghis, among them Abdul Malik, Rashid Dostum, Juma Khan, and Ismail Khan.⁷⁵⁵ An EU-funded Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM) household assessment report of November 2018 indicated that the security situation has worsened in Badghis in 2018 due to fighting between

⁷⁴⁰ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Badghis, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 41

⁷⁴¹ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#); UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

⁷⁴² Frontier Post (The), Ghormach falls to Taliban as ANA troops move to Maimana, 28 August 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁴³ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁴ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁴⁵ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Badghis, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁶ AREU, The Political Economy of Education and Health Service Delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016, [url](#), pp. 44-46; Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Decrees on \$100m loan for 2 projects approved, 6 January 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁸ In 2019, Badghis was a drought-hit province (see: EEAS, Contribution from the European Union enhances resilience in Badghis Province, 28 October 2019, [url](#)), which made people vulnerable to AGEs recruitment (see: National Geographic, In Afghanistan, climate change complicates prospects for peace, 3 February 2020, [url](#))

⁷⁴⁹ National Geographic, In Afghanistan, climate change complicates prospects for peace, 3 February 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁰ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 16

⁷⁵¹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

⁷⁵² AAN, New world drug report: opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁵³ Salaam Times, Afghan border forces, police block Taliban drug trafficking route in Herat, 5 July 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁴ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁵ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Badghis Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

insurgents and government forces in Jawand and Qadis.⁷⁵⁶ Since 2014, Badghis province has been a hotbed of fighting between the Taliban, IMU and ANDSF.⁷⁵⁷ Since 2016, Badghis was amongst the western provinces witnessing clashes between Taliban factions each loyal to a different commander.⁷⁵⁸ In July 2019, Khaama Press reported that Badghis province was one of the ‘relatively volatile’ north-western provinces of Afghanistan.⁷⁵⁹

In October 2019, UNAMA, indicated that the four western provinces of Afghanistan including Badghis, in the recent years have experienced a growing number of insurgent activities.⁷⁶⁰ According to Etilaatroz, since March 2019, Taliban fighters continued their attacks on Bala Murghab district and extended their presence into Jawand, Ab Kamari, Muqur and Qadis districts, where intense clashes continued between the group and Afghan forces. The source quoted Ziaulhaq Ferozkohi, political activist in Badghis province, stating that [informal translation] the ‘Taliban control major territory in Badghis province including and entirely Bala Murghab District and its capital. Residents left the district, and only military outposts remained. The government control only the capitals of Qadis, Ab Kamari and Muqur Districts.’ According to the source, a security in-charge for Badghis, who did not want to be named, stated that [informal translation] ‘Taliban have been collecting 500 AFG (around 5 Euros) per month per family, and the group monopolised the pistachio farms’. The source also quoted Sharifullah Chamtoo, Badghis chief police, stating [informal translation] ‘all districts of Badghis province are under the government control.’⁷⁶¹ While according to information contained in a LWJ map, Ghormach, Muqur and Bala Murghab districts of Badghis province were under the Taliban control, and Ab Kamari, Qala-i Naw, Qadis and Jawand districts were contested.⁷⁶²

In December 2019, Taliban issued a statement claiming that they have taken the control of Bala Murghab district capital⁷⁶³ and in March 2020, a local news quoted Najmulddin Burhani the spokesman for Badghis Governor stating that Rubat area of Qadis district was under the Taliban control.⁷⁶⁴ On 4 May 2020, Taliban reported that several of *Mujahidin* (Taliban fighters) were graduated from *Saad Ben Abi Weqaas* military training camp in Badghis province. They claim that these fighters got trained on military warfare in using light and heavy weapons including laser weapons. The group posted several photos of the alleged fighters during the training.⁷⁶⁵

The International Public Policy (IPP) Review stated in January 2019, that the Islamic State of Khorasan has cultivated its presence among other provinces of northern Afghanistan also in Badghis.⁷⁶⁶

Regarding the presence of ANDSF in Badghis province, the 3rd Regiment of Zafar 207th Corps of ANA (which is responsible for the western provinces of Afghanistan), is based in Badghis.⁷⁶⁷ As part of the

⁷⁵⁶ ERM, Household Assessment Report, 1 November 2018, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁵⁷ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁵⁸ Strategy Page, Afghanistan: Perpetual Pressure On Pakistan, 13 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁵⁹ Khaama Press, Airstrike kills 8 Taliban militants in Bala Murghab district of Badghis Province, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁰ UNAMA, Badghis leaders strategize on stronger measures to protect children in armed conflict, 5 October 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶¹ Etilaatroz, *بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه* [informal translation: ‘security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban’s mobility to heavy losses of the group’], 30 August 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶² LWJ, Several Districts Change Hands as Fighting Rages in Northern Afghanistan, 6 July 2020, [url](#); however the source does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated

⁷⁶³ Voice of Jihad, *د تېر کال فتوحاتو ته ځغلنده کتنه* [informal translation: ‘a quick look at last year’s victories’], 31 December 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁴ SubheKabul, *خودکشی یېک دختر جوان در ولایت بادغیس* [informal translation: ‘a young girl committed suicide in Badghis Province’], 3 March 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁵ Voice of Jihad, *بادغیس: کی لسکونه مجاهدين د سعد بن ابی وقاص له معسکر نه فارغ شول* [informal translation: ‘Badghis: tens of *Mujahidin* (fighters) were graduated from *Saad Ben Abi Weqaas* military training camp in Badghis province’], 4 May 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁶ IPP Review, The Islamic State of Khorasan Expands in Afghanistan, 3 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶⁷ Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url](#); USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 58 - 59

RS (Resolute Support) mission, Italian forces provide ‘functionality-based’ security assistance to ANA 207th Corps and ANP in the west of Afghanistan including Badghis.⁷⁶⁸

2.3.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.3.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 161 civilian casualties, including 77 killed and 84 injured in Badghis province, which represents 104 % increase compared to 2018. The leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, air strikes and non-suicide IEDs.⁷⁶⁹ According to SIGAR, RS recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Badghis province during the first quarter of 2020⁷⁷⁰, and the mentioned source recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020.⁷⁷¹

According to ACLED data, between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 there were 388 security incidents recorded in Badghis province, of which 241 were coded as battles, 133 remote violence and 14 incidents of violence against civilians.

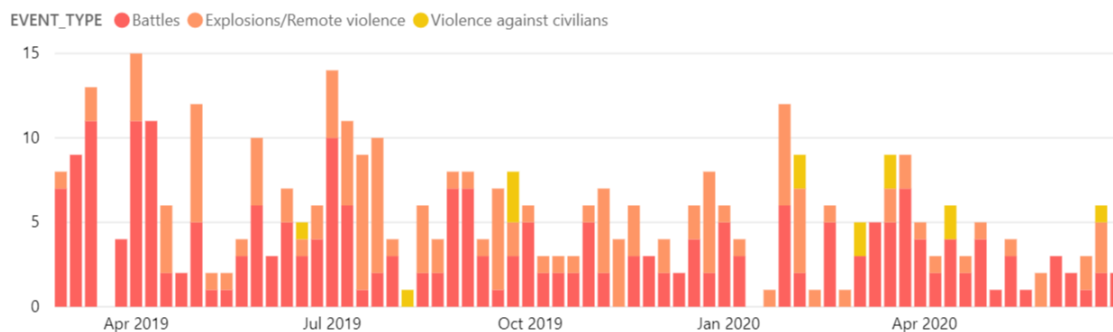


Figure 5. Badghis - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data⁷⁷²

According to Etilaatroz, since August 2019, Badghis province continued to be besieged where all supplying roads were shut down due to the continued armed clashes between the Taliban fighters and the Afghan security forces.⁷⁷³ UNOCHA indicated in December 2019 that since one year AGEs blocked main roads to Jawand district, which interrupted the transportation of essential needs to civilians living in the area.⁷⁷⁴ In November 2019, another source reported that all roads to Jawand district have been mined by the Taliban, which resulted in severe food and supply shortages in the area.⁷⁷⁵ In January 2020, a local news reported on the presence of the Taliban’s prison in Badghis province from which the Afghan government forces rescued 55 ANA soldiers, four commandos, one police and two border police personnel.⁷⁷⁶ In April 2020, NYT reported on the presence of a Taliban checkpoint established in the village of Laman in Qala-i Naw City, the provincial capital, where the group shot and killed one civilian driver who refused to stop his car at Taliban’s order.⁷⁷⁷ During the same period, Taliban militants blocked the highway of Qadis-Qala-i Naw to carry out an attack against the Afghan forces.⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁶⁸ USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

⁷⁶⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

⁷⁷⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

⁷⁷¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

⁷⁷² Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badghis; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁷³ Etilaatroz, *بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه* [informal translation: ‘security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban’s mobility to heavy losses of the group’], 30 August 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian updated 25 November to 1 December 2019, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁵ Tolonews, Badghis: District with mined roads faces food shortage crisis, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁶ Salaam Times, Rescued Afghan soldiers speak of appalling torture, brutality in Taliban prison, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁷⁸ Afghanistan Times, At least 12 Taliban rebels killed in Badghis, 13 April 2020, [url](#)

On 20 May 2020, Salaam Times report that the Taliban blocked roads to the districts of Badghis and prevented local people, government and health workers to enter Bala Murghab, Jawand and Qadis districts. The source also indicated that Taliban in Badghis province restarted to impose restrictions on private telecommunication companies, telecom which is used by 70 % of Badghis population to maintain the system only between 6 a.m. and 5 p.m. in Badghis province and shut it down during the night.⁷⁷⁹

Recent incidents that caused civilian casualties in Badghis province in 2019 and 2020 include: three civilians killed, (including one woman) and three others injured (including two women and a girl) during ground engagement between the Taliban and ANA in Ab Kamari district on 17 July 2019⁷⁸⁰; three civilians killed on 19 July 2019 by an air strike hitting a house in the Du Juee area of Bala Murghab district⁷⁸¹; on 23 July 2019, a high school teacher was killed, and two other civilians wounded after a rocket fired from an Afghan helicopter struck their shop in the Joy-e Ganj area of Bala Murghab district⁷⁸²; on 20 July 2019, an Afghan air forces' air strike, which hit a family's house, killed five civilians, all members of a single family, in the Akazi area of Bala Murghab district, which was reportedly controlled by the Taliban⁷⁸³; on 27 July 2019 an air strike reportedly killed four civilians including a tribal leader, following their meeting with the Taliban officials in Regi village of Jawand district⁷⁸⁴; on 30 October 2019, a civilian driver was killed by the Taliban attack on a convoy of local officials in the village of Qarchaghay in Qala-i Naw district⁷⁸⁵; on 7 November 2019, six civilians were killed including three women and three children when the house of a Taliban commander was bombed by an air strike in the village of Maidah Qol in Aa Kamari district⁷⁸⁶; on 3 January 2020, one child was killed in a roadside bomb explosion when he was looking for his sheep in the village of Na-Khod-Amodah in Qadis district⁷⁸⁷; on 25 April 2020, a woman was killed, and a child was wounded after a Taliban alleged mortar hit their house in the village of Kamengi Oliya in Qadis district⁷⁸⁸; on 25 May 2020, three children were killed after a bomb planted by the Taliban exploded in Chashma-Dozdak village of Muqur district⁷⁸⁹; on 1 May 2020, the Taliban destroyed, in an explosion, a school in Qadis district that was recently constructed.⁷⁹⁰

2.3.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 29 359 persons displaced from Badghis province, with 84 % displaced within the province itself (mainly in Bala Murghab and Qala-i Naw districts), 14 % were displaced into Herat province and the remaining 2 % were displaced into Faryab and Ghor provinces.⁷⁹¹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 24 593 persons displaced to Badghis province, with almost 99 % coming from within the province itself.⁷⁹²

Between 6 – 12 January 2020, the conflict reportedly continued between ANSF and AGEs in Badghis and an estimated number of 17 335 conflict affected IDPs were identified in 'hard-to-reach' areas in Badghis province.⁷⁹³ According to

⁷⁷⁹ Salaam Times, Taliban's blockade of districts in Badghis endangers thousands of lives, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 72

⁷⁸¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁸² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁸³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-1 Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁷ NYT, Afghan Casualty Report: January 2020, (sic) 2 January 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report, April 2020, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report, May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁰ Salaam Times, Enemies of education: Taliban blow up newly constructed school in Badghis, 13 May 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

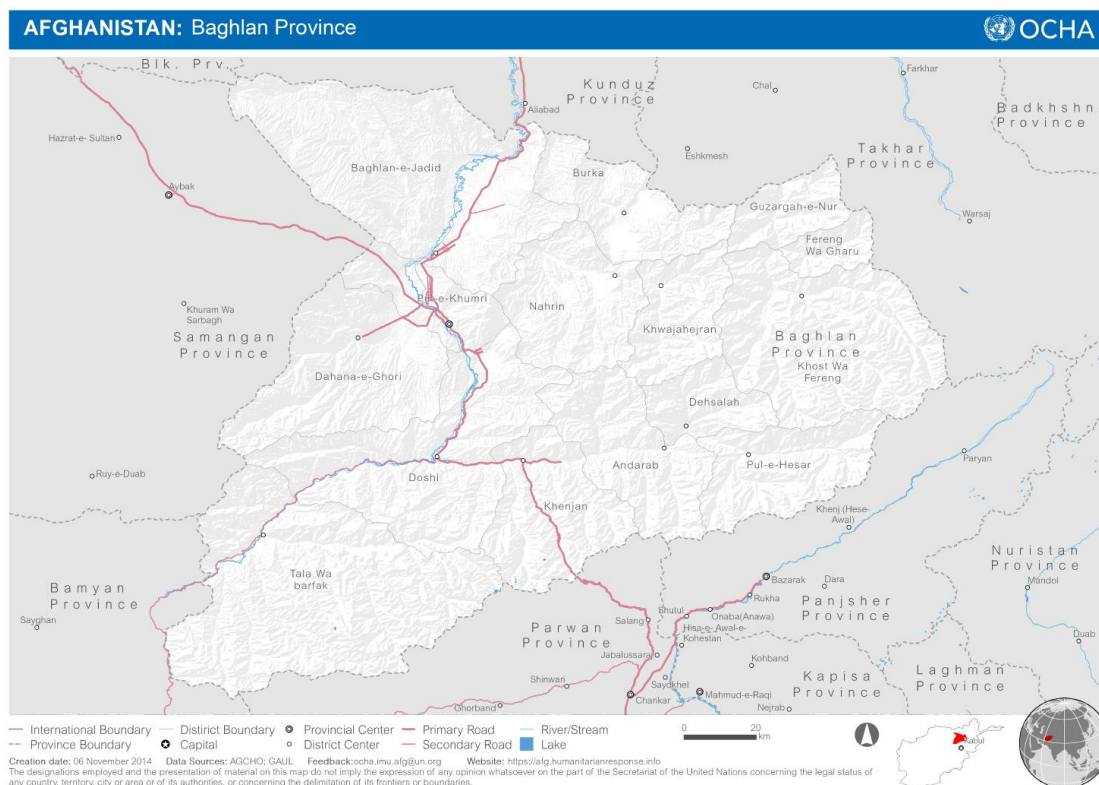
⁷⁹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Weekly humanitarian update, 6 - 12 January 2020, [url](#)

UNOCHA, during the period between 28 April and 4 May 2020, security situation in Badghis remained unstable and the ongoing conflict displaced 400 families (around 2 800 individuals) in Badghis and Ghor provinces. During the same period, in Badghis province, 294 people affected by flash flood received humanitarian assistance.⁷⁹⁴

2.4 Baghlan

2.4.1 General description of the province



Map 4: Afghanistan – Baghlan province, source: UNOCHA⁷⁹⁵

Baghlan province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Bamiyan, Samangan, Kunduz, Takhar, Panjshir, Parwan⁷⁹⁶ and Balkh.⁷⁹⁷ Baghlan province is divided into the following administrative units: Andarab, Baghlan-e-Jadid (also known as Baghlan-e Markazi), Burka, Dahana-e Ghuri, Deh Salah, Doshi, Fereng wa Gharu, Guzargah-e Nur, Khenjan, Khost wa Fereng, Khwajahejran (Jalga), Nahrin, Pul-e Hesar, Pul-e Khumri, and Tala wa Barfak. The provincial capital is Pul-e Khumri.⁷⁹⁸

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA the province has a population of 1 014 634, 242 859 of whom live in the provincial capital, Pul-e Khumri.⁷⁹⁹ The main ethnic groups in the province are Tajiks, Pashtuns and Hazaras. Other ethnic groups present include Uzbeks and Tatars.⁸⁰⁰

Baghlan province is connected to eight other provinces by the Kabul-North Highway. This is the only trans-Hindukush highway in Afghanistan and the major transit route between Kabul and the north of

⁷⁹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Weekly humanitarian update, 24 April – 4 May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Baghlan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: North Eastern Region – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#), pp. 32-45

⁷⁹⁷ AIMS, AIMS Political Divisions Map, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁹⁸ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Baghlan, 2020, [url](#);

NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 18

⁷⁹⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 18

⁸⁰⁰ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Baghlan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

the country, via the Salang pass. The road forks at the northern edge of provincial capital Pul-e Khumri, north-west to Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province, north-east towards Kunduz.⁸⁰¹ At the border between Baghlan and Parwan, the highway leads through the notoriously overcrowded and desolate Salang Tunnel.⁸⁰² Besides the Kabul-North Highway Baghlan should be connected to Bamyan by December 2022 via the so-called Baghlan to Bamyan (B2B) road, according to plans by the World Bank.⁸⁰³ Baghlan's capital Pul-e Khumri is known to be an economic hub.⁸⁰⁴

According to AAN, the Kabul-North Highway is pivotal for the military success of government forces, as AGEs are able to hinder the movement of ammunition and troops by blocking the highway, as they did, for example, after an attack on a checkpoint in Pul-e Khumri on 4 December 2019.⁸⁰⁵ AAN links the Taliban's success in conquering and holding Kunduz City for two weeks in 2015 to the fact that they were able to stop Kunduz-bound military convoys in Baghlan for days with a combination of road blocks and ambushes.⁸⁰⁶ In a conversation with Landinfo in October 2019, an international source described the stretch on Highway One between Kabul and Pul-e Khumri as sufficiently safe, including for international travellers. On the road further north, however, several incidents and road closures and obstructions as a result of clashes and non-state armed groups' presence and activity were reported.⁸⁰⁷ AGEs reportedly draw revenue from extorting money from fuel trucks passing through Baghlan.⁸⁰⁸

The security along the highway is also pivotal for Kabul's energy supply, as electricity transmission lines originating in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan run along the highway. Power lines and towers at times suffered damage by Taliban attacks or clashes between the Taliban and government forces in the reporting period.⁸⁰⁹

There were reports of protesters blocking the Kabul-North Highway in March 2019 and in April 2019 after the announcement of the parliamentary elections results.⁸¹⁰ One participant in the April protest was killed and six others wounded when security forces opened fire to clear the road.⁸¹¹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Baghlan does not belong to the ten main opium poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan.⁸¹² Opium poppy cultivation in Baghlan remained approximately the same in 2018 compared to 2017.⁸¹³

⁸⁰¹ Hewad, G., The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, AAN, 21 October 2015, [url](#); Ali, O., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁰² Pajhwok Afghan News, Current Salang tunnel insufficient, says President Ghani, 15 October 2018, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Fixing the Salang Pass Tunnel, 21 October 2015, [url](#)

⁸⁰³ World Bank (The), Trans-Hindukush Road Connectivity Project, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁰⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan administrative units, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁰⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁶ Hewad, G., The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, AAN, 21 October 2015, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁷ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22/01/2019, [url](#), p. 29; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 September – 6 October 2019), 9 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 October – 27 October 2019), 30 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (2 December – 8 December 2019), 11 December 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 December – 22 December 2019), 26 December 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 January – 26 January 2020), 29 January 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (10 February – 16 February 2020), 19 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁸ Salam Watandar, Taliban collecting billions through illicit customs, religious taxes, 16 May 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Power transmission line damaged in Baghlan, 18 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul in dark as 3 pylons blown up in Baghlan, 15 September 2019, [url](#)

⁸¹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan protestors unblock Kabul-North highway, 13 March 2019, [url](#)

⁸¹¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 person killed, 5 injured as Baghlan protest turned violent, 27 April 2019, [url](#)

⁸¹² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

⁸¹³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

2.4.2 Conflict background and actors in Baghlan

The transport routes leading through Baghlan are decisive for the security situation of the province. According to AAN, the Taliban started intimidating people travelling along the Baghlan-Balkh Highway in late 2015.⁸¹⁴ In October 2019, Afghanistan Analyst Obaid Ali described how the Taliban established a presence at different locations around Highway One and the split of the road towards Kunduz.⁸¹⁵ Having understood the strategic importance of the main transport routes in the province, the Taliban established mobile checkpoints on the Baghlan-Balkh Highway in order to search for ANSF members and attempted to establish a permanent presence in the area. This helped them to obstruct the use of Highway One when carrying out larger attacks⁸¹⁶, such as the offensive on provincial capital Pul-e Khumri in early September 2019, at a time when talks with the United States were leading up to the signing of an agreement.⁸¹⁷ In response to the Taliban establishing checkpoints, ANSF have conducted several clearance operations, which, according to AAN, were ‘inconsequential’ and hence unsuccessful in creating a coherent government presence in the area.⁸¹⁸

The security situation in Baghlan province reportedly worsened in 2016 after the Taliban launched concerted actions against key districts near the provincial centre of Pul-e Khumri.⁸¹⁹ In spring 2018, the Afghan Ministry of Defence (MoD) admitted that the provincial capital Pul-e Khumri was threatened by the Taliban⁸²⁰, and by December 2018 the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) counted Baghlan among the provinces with a high Taliban presence and where Afghan forces have been engaged in deadly battles in parts of the province.⁸²¹

According to an Afghanistan analyst contacted by the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) in January 2020, Kunduz and Baghlan were considered to be the most Taliban-controlled or influenced provinces in the north-eastern region.⁸²² A similar assessment was made by Afghanistan analyst Obaid Ali in October 2019.⁸²³ In September 2019, no presidential elections took place in Dahana-e Ghuri district, due to the Taliban controlling this district⁸²⁴, but in late October 2019, after three years under Taliban control, government forces re-captured that district.⁸²⁵ As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Burka and Tala wa Barfak districts as ‘Taliban-controlled’, Andarab district as ‘government-controlled’ and the remaining districts in Baghlan province as ‘contested’.⁸²⁶

⁸¹⁴ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, [url](#)

⁸¹⁵ Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

⁸¹⁶ Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

⁸¹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 35; Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 27-28; NYT, Taliban Attack Second Afghan City in Two Days as an Agreement for Peace Nears, 1 September 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, US envoy shows draft of deal with Taliban to Afghan president, 2 September 2019, [url](#); Ali, O., Ruttig T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

⁸¹⁸ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, [url](#)

⁸¹⁹ Khaama Press, Taliban's deputy military chief surrenders in Baghlan province, 12 August 2017, [url](#)

⁸²⁰ Tolonews, 7 Provincial Centers Face ‘Serious Security Threats’, 16 May 2018, [url](#)

⁸²¹ Tolonews, Afghan Forces To Focus On Insecure Regions In Winter, 26 December 2018, [url](#)

⁸²² Sweden, Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 48

⁸²³ Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

⁸²⁴ Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

⁸²⁵ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/582-S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6; Tolonews, Baghlan’s Dahna-e-Ghori Retaken By Security Troops: MoD, 24 October 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Around 100 Taliban militants killed, 88 arrested in Special Forces raids in Baghlan: Sources, 25 October 2019, [url](#)

⁸²⁶ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

Besides Taliban fighters, local pro-government militias supported by the National Directorate of Security used to be active in the province, e.g. in the Surkh Kotal area eight kilometres north-west of Pul-e Khumri.⁸²⁷

In response to the Taliban offensive on Pul-e Khumri in September 2019, the government forces received support by armed residents. According to sources consulted by AAN, these people were members of various uprising groups led mostly by commanders affiliated with Jamiat-e Islami.⁸²⁸

According to an AAN report from July 2016, Afghan ethnic Uzbeks set up an insurgent group called Jundullah in 2009 by splitting away from IMU.⁸²⁹ While Jundullah has been affiliated with the Taliban in the past, it established itself as an independent, IS-allied group by taking advantage of the turmoil created by the Taliban conquest of Kunduz in September 2015. Unsympathetic towards IS-groups, the Taliban contained Jundullah's activities in Baghlan by 2016. According to the same report, as of July 2016, '[...] the threat of Daesh in the north-east – through Jundullah affiliating itself to IS – is neither widespread, nor immediate.'⁸³⁰ A December 2018 report by the US Counter-Terrorism Center (CTC) on IS-groups in Afghanistan, counted one ISKP attack in Baghlan between 2014 and 2018. The attack took place in 2017 causing the deaths of nine persons.⁸³¹ While the Lead Inspector General for Operation's Freedom Sentinel referred to the existence of smaller groups of supporters in Baghlan in 2019⁸³², and an official statement about the arrest of a key ISKP member was published in May 2019⁸³³, no security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were registered by ACLED in Baghlan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.⁸³⁴

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Baghlan province is under the responsibility of the 217th ANA corps after ANA's 20th Division, previously under the ANA 209th Corps, was reassigned in April 2019 to become a new corps, the 217th Corps.⁸³⁵ The 217th Corps has its headquarters in Kunduz.⁸³⁶ As of 30 April 2020 Baghlan province was still included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.⁸³⁷

2.4.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.4.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 349 civilian casualties (123 deaths and 226 injured) in Baghlan. This represents an increase of 34 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground

⁸²⁷ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, [url](#)

⁸²⁸ Ali, O., Ruttig Th., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

⁸²⁹ Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), AAN, 15 July 2016, [url](#)

⁸³⁰ Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), AAN, 15 July 2016, [url](#)

⁸³¹ Jadoon, A., Allied and Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, CTC Sentinel, 3 December 2018, [url](#), pp. 11, 15

⁸³² USDOD, Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Lead Inspector General Report To The United States Congress. July 1, 2019–September 30, 2019, 18 November 2019, [url](#), p. 18; USDOD, Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Lead Inspector General Report To The United States Congress. October 1, 2019–December 31, 2019, 14 February 2020, [url](#), p. 13

⁸³³ Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces arrest key ISIS group member in Baghlan province, 16 May 2019, [url](#)

⁸³⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁸³⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 78

⁸³⁶ USDOD, Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Lead Inspector General Report To The United States Congress. April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019, 16 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁸³⁷ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12, 50; USDOD, Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Lead Inspector General Report To The United States Congress. April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019, 16 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 27-28; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

engagements followed by targeted/deliberate killings and non-suicide IEDs.⁸³⁸ Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Baghlan in the first half of 2020, reporting a decrease in civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.⁸³⁹

ACLED collected data on 444 violent events in Baghlan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 304 of which were coded as 'battles', 118 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 22 as 'violence against civilians'.⁸⁴⁰ With 188 reported incidents, Pul-e Khumri stood out as the district where most violent events were reported, followed by Baghlan-e Jadid with 93 incidents. No violent events were registered by ACLED in Fereng Wa Gharu and Khost wa Fereng districts.⁸⁴¹

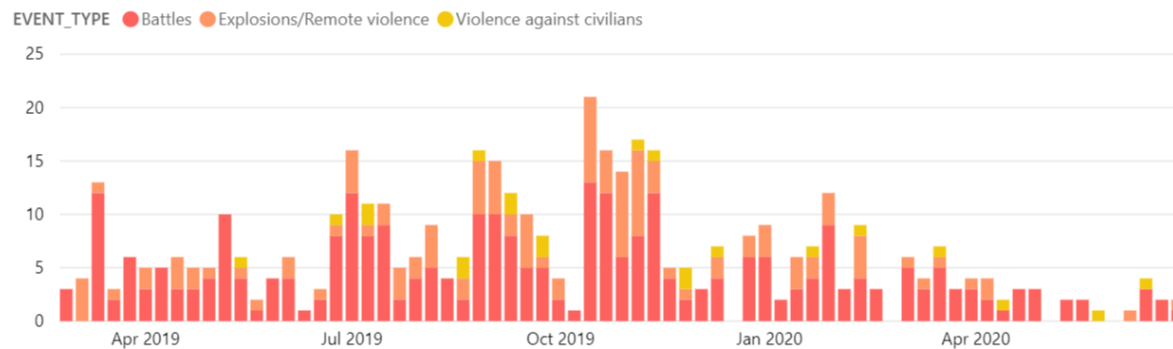


Figure 6. Baghlan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data⁸⁴²

ACLED coded around 68 % of the violent incidents in Baghlan province as 'battles', mainly 'armed clashes'. This category represented the most prevalent incident type in nearly all of Baghlan's districts.⁸⁴³ The majority of those armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police, military or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or so-called Arbakis (the term 'Arbaki' is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias)⁸⁴⁴, or attacks on military or police facilities such

⁸³⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94. No UNAMA data on civilian casualties in Baghlan province were available for the first half of 2020.

⁸³⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 72

⁸⁴⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁸⁴¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision Code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁸⁴² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Baghlan, [url](#)

⁸⁴³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁸⁴⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-july 4, 4 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Deputy intelligence chief for Baghlan gunned down, 12 May 2019, [url](#)

as checkpoints⁸⁴⁵, bases⁸⁴⁶ and headquarters⁸⁴⁷ and on convoys.⁸⁴⁸ These incidents at times resulted in civilian casualties, as for example on 5 May 2019 when in addition to dozens of casualties among police forces, more than ten civilians were injured in a coordinated attack claimed by the Taliban on police headquarters in Pul-e Khumri City.⁸⁴⁹ Responding to a Taliban attack in Chashma-e Sher area of Pul-e Khumri City, an Afghan air force helicopter hit a house in April 2020. As a result, two children were killed and six civilians were wounded.⁸⁵⁰

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED. With the approval of the Ministry of Defence's Operation Khalid on 2 April 2019, Baghlan was one of the provinces in the north-east that security forces' operations focused on.⁸⁵¹ Most operations were carried out in May 2019 and from September to November 2019.⁸⁵² Some ANDSF operations lead to the recapturing of villages in certain districts of Baghlan, including Baghlan-e Jadid in June 2019, Burka in December 2019, the Kelagai area of Doshi district in October 2019 or the Dand-e Shahabuddin area of Pul-e Khumri district in October 2019.⁸⁵³ Some operations were backed by air strikes, as for example in Baghlan-e Jadid district in early June 2019⁸⁵⁴ or in Dahana-e Ghuri district at the end of July 2019.⁸⁵⁵

There were reports on the Taliban capturing smaller areas in the reporting period, such as the strategic Kayan valley in Doshi district in July 2019.⁸⁵⁶ Taliban and other sources also reported on the Taliban attacking the district headquarters in Burka district on 3 May 2019⁸⁵⁷, the centre of Guzargah-e Nur district in July 2019⁸⁵⁸, or attacking villages and areas in Nahrin and Baghlan-e Jadid districts in September 2019.⁸⁵⁹ The Taliban reportedly took control over Guzargah-e Nur district in Baghlan province in September 2019 for a few months until government forces recaptured the district in January 2020.⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁴⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-july 4, 4 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 31-June 6, 6 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁴⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Taliban Kill Unarmed Afghan Police Officers Waiting for Pay, 5 May 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan attack ends as all 8 attackers eliminated, 5 May 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 75 people suffer casualties in Sunday attack: Baghlan governor, 6 May 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁵¹ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/902-S/2019/493, 14 June 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁸⁵² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁸⁵³ Tolonews, Large Scale Operation Launched In Baghlan, 17 October 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁴ Khaama Press, 11 Taliban militants killed in Special Forces raid, airstrikes in Laghman and Baghlan, 4 June 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#); Khaama Press, 52 militants killed, 33 wounded as Afghan forces repulse Taliban attack in Baghlan, 30 July 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁶ Khaama Press, Taliban militants take control of the strategic Kayan Valley in Baghlan province, 2 July 2019, [url](#); Xinhua, Taliban overruns area in N. Afghanistan's Baghlan province, 2 July 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁵⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces retake control of Baghlan's Guzarga Noor district, 30 January 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Afghan Forces Retake Guzargah-e-Noor District of Baghlan, 1 February 2020, [url](#); UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/582-S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6

More than half of the 118 reported incidents of explosions/remote violence, registered by ACLED in Baghlan between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, were incidents where the Taliban or unidentified armed groups used roadside bombs or IEDs, including pressure-plate IEDs⁸⁶¹ or magnetic bombs⁸⁶² to target security forces.⁸⁶³ These incidents represented 14 % of all violent incidents in Baghlan province and at times resulted in civilian casualties, for example on 14 May 2019 when explosives attached to vehicles went off in Pul-e Khumri⁸⁶⁴, on 4 June 2019 when people leaving a mosque after Eid prayers in Nahrin district were hit by a bomb explosion⁸⁶⁵ or on 4 November 2019, when a road mine blast hit a family in Dand-e Shahabuddin area of Pul-e Khumri City.⁸⁶⁶

Over one third of the reported incidents of explosions/remote violence and representing 10 % of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Baghlan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 were air/drone strikes.⁸⁶⁷ Air strikes were mainly carried out in Pul-e Khumri, Baghlan-e Jadid and Dahana-e Ghuri districts and most were carried out by Afghan forces, while some were attributed to US forces.⁸⁶⁸ While those air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs, some also caused civilian casualties, as happened in Pul-e Khumri in July 2019 and April 2020.⁸⁶⁹

ACLED coded a few incidents of shelling in Baghlan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.⁸⁷⁰ Some of those attributed to ANDSF caused civilian casualties as happened in Nahrin district on 23 September 2019 when a group of children were killed when an unexploded rocket shell went off while they were playing⁸⁷¹ or in Pul-e Khumri on 9 March 2020 when a mortar shell fired from a military base hit a civilian home, killing one person and wounding four others.⁸⁷²

Twenty two incidents categorised by ACLED as violence against civilians represented 5 % of all violent events in Baghlan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.⁸⁷³ These included the kidnapping and/or killing by armed groups, including the Taliban, of an off-duty soldier in Baghlan-e Jadid in June

⁸⁶¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (October 2019), 23 November 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁶² NYT, 1 August 2019, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 policemen killed, as many wounded in Pul-i-Khumri blast, 19 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan police official killed in explosion, 17 September 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁶³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 15-21, 22 March 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 31-June 6, 6 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Magnetic bomb blast leaves 7 civilians injured in Baghlan, 14 May 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 worshippers killed, 12 injured in Baghlan blast, 4 June 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 2 civilians killed, 14 wounded in an explosion in Baghlan province, 4 June 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#); KUNA, Roadside blast kills 8 civilians in N. Afghanistan, 4 November 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 of a family killed in Baghlan roadside bombing, 4 November 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁶⁷ These do not include air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under 'battles'. For more information on ACLED's methodology, please consult the introduction.

⁸⁶⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁸⁶⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-July 4, 4 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 women killed in airstrike on a house in Baghlan, 4 July 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Baghlan Residents Rally Against Civilian Casualties, 9 July 2019, [url](#); Ariana News, Eight family members killed, wounded in airstrikes – Baghlan, 4 April 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 17

⁸⁷⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁸⁷¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁷² Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 killed, 4 wounded in Baghlan mortar strike, 9 March 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁷³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

2019⁸⁷⁴, of government representatives and employees near Pul-e Khumri in August 2019⁸⁷⁵, of civilians in Nahrin district in September 2019⁸⁷⁶, of education personnel in Nahrin district in May 2019 and in Baghlan-e Jadid and Doshi district in November 2019⁸⁷⁷ and the killing of a truck driver in Doshi district in February 2020.⁸⁷⁸ Unknown armed men killed five members of one family in Deh Salah district on 16 April 2020.⁸⁷⁹ An imam succumbed to his injuries after being beaten for performing the funeral of a local police officer in Dahana-i Ghuri district in June 2020.⁸⁸⁰ Taliban sources reported incidents of Afghan security forces killing civilians in targeted attacks or during operations.⁸⁸¹ In addition to the incidents registered by ACLED, UNAMA documented the killing of the brother of a Taliban fighter by the ALP in Pul-e Khumri district on 25 November 2019 as an act of revenge for the killing of one of their commanders. Two other civilians were wounded in the incident.⁸⁸²

There were reports from the north-eastern region, including from Baghlan province, of electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019.⁸⁸³ Baghlan was, after Kunduz, the province with the second-lowest turnout numbers for the presidential election of 28 September 2019 in Afghanistan. This was, as in Kunduz, attributed to bad security. The main roads connecting Baghlan to Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif and Kunduz were blocked by the Taliban. Direct attacks on polling centres and rocket shelling were reported from Pul-e Khumri and Doshi districts.⁸⁸⁴

In April 2019 the Baghlan police chief announced the establishment of new checkpoints to improve security along the Baghlan-Balkh Highway.⁸⁸⁵ The Taliban however carried out attacks on checkpoints on the Baghlan-Samangan Highway in March and May 2019 and in January 2020⁸⁸⁶ and on the Kunduz-Baghlan Highway in July 2019, January and February 2020.⁸⁸⁷ Oil tanker drivers and directors of petroleum companies complained in March 2019 about increasing attacks on their trucks in Baghlan, particularly around Dand-e Ghor locality in Pul-e Khumri and Kelagi locality in Doshi district.⁸⁸⁸ Another attack on oil tankers was reported from Pul-e Khumri district in May 2019.⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁷⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban militants kidnap a member of Provincial Council from Samangan-Baghlan Highway, 24 August 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Samangan Provincial Council Member Killed By Militants: Official, 25 August 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul university teacher shot dead in Baghlan, 6 November 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Headmaster among 4 gunned down in Baghlan, 30 November 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁷⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 of a family gunned down in Baghlan attack, 16 April 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁰ Reporterly, Imam in Baghlan Dies After Being Beaten by Taliban, 21 June 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#); Voice of Jihad, Innocent civilian martyred in Baghlan, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 67

⁸⁸³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, [url](#); Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 10; NYT, To Disrupt Elections, Taliban Turn to an Old Tactic: Destroying Cell Towers, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁴ Ali, O., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁵ Tolonews, Baghlan Police Chief Warns Taliban To Quit Violence, 7 April 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁶ Xinhua, 14 including 8 militants killed in northern Afghan province, 29 May 2019, [url](#); Xinhua, 1st LD Writethru: 9 police killed in Taliban attack in N. Afghanistan, 28 January 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces storm key Taliban compound in Baghlan province, 3 March 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Police Suffer Heavy Casualties in Baghlan, 28 January 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁷ Tolonews, MEHWAR: Insecurity Increases In Baghlan, 13 July 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan forces suffer casualties in Taliban attacks, 23 January 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Five Security Force Members Killed on Kunduz-Baghlan Highway, 2 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Militant attacks on oil tankers increasing in Baghlan, 30 March 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁸⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban attack leaves 2 oil tankers torched in Baghlan, 12 May 2019, [url](#)

Sources reported an explosion inside a doctor's private clinic in Pul-e Khumri on 4 April 2019. The doctor was killed and several patients were injured.⁸⁹⁰ According to further investigation by UNAMA, the doctor had received dead threats from the Taliban.⁸⁹¹ UNAMA also documented the forced closure of 11 clinics in different districts of Baghlan province on 12 May 2019. All were reopened within the next week.⁸⁹²

In its report covering 2019 UNAMA noted that in certain parts of Afghanistan, including Baghlan, several private telecommunications companies, with the exception of Salaam Telecommunications, shut down their services in the evening following up on orders issued by the Taliban in order to prevent being tracked down or targeted during operations.⁸⁹³

While armed clashes were the prevalent type of violent event, similar as in almost all of Baghlan's districts, Pul-e Khumri showed a somewhat different conflict pattern with nearly one out of four incidents involving the use of IEDs.⁸⁹⁴ The police headquarters in Pul-e Khumri City were the target of a coordinated attack, involving a suicide bombing, on 5 May 2019.⁸⁹⁵ On 2 February 2020, a suicide bomber detonated his explosives before he had reached his target, an engagement ceremony, in Pul-e Khumri.⁸⁹⁶ Such attacks, which have been carried out in other larger cities in Afghanistan as well⁸⁹⁷, were not reported from other districts in Baghlan province.⁸⁹⁸

In late August, early September 2019, the Taliban attacked and penetrated three provincial centres in one week's time, first Kunduz, immediately followed by Pul-e Khumri and then Farah.⁸⁹⁹ After having been driven out of Kunduz following their attack on the city, several Taliban fighters reportedly moved to Baghlan province where they launched an offensive on the provincial capital on 1 September 2019.⁹⁰⁰ They were able to enter deep into the city and hold out for several days. This was the first such attack for Pul-e Khumri.⁹⁰¹ During the attack, the Taliban forcibly entered residential homes.⁹⁰² According to the head of the provincial council in Baghlan, heavy fighting caused people to panic and to try to flee.⁹⁰³ The attackers were pushed back, but clashes continued on the outskirts of

⁸⁹⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 29-April 4, 4 April 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Physician killed, 20 civilians injured in Baghlan blast, 4 April 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 45

⁸⁹² UNAMA, Afghanistan The Protection Of Civilians In Armed Midyear Update Conflict: 1 January To 30 June 2019, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁸⁹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 109-110; See also: Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban continue telecom services shutdown in Baghlan, 14 August 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁸⁹⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan attack ends as all 8 attackers eliminated, 5 May 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Attack on Baghlan Police HQ claims the lives of 13 people, wounding 55 others, 5 May 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Death Toll Rises To 20 In Baghlan Police HQ Attack, 6 May 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 75 people suffer casualties in Sunday attack: Baghlan governor, 6 May 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Bomber killed, 2 civilians injured in Baghlan, 2 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 39; EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁸⁹⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁸⁹⁹ Ali, O., Ruttig T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁰ NYT, Taliban Attack Second Afghan City in 2 Days as Peace Deal Nears, 1 September 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Amid heavy fighting in north, US envoy meets Afghan president, 2 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁰¹ Ali, O., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁰² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 51; NYT, War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 killed, 33 injured in Baghlan clashes, 1 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁰³ NYT, Taliban Attack Second Afghan City in Two Days as an Agreement for Peace Nears, 1 September 2019, [url](#)

the city in the following days.⁹⁰⁴ According to a diplomatic source interviewed by the Norwegian Country of Origin Information centre, Landinfo, in October 2019, the fall of provincial capitals Kunduz, Pul-e Khumri and Taloqan (Takhar) was prevented due to air strikes.⁹⁰⁵ Civilian casualties and displacement were reported.⁹⁰⁶ While operations were carried out for reopening the Kabul-North and the Pul-e Khumri-Mazar Highways⁹⁰⁷, exit routes from the city remained contested and movement obstructed during more than a week following the attack.⁹⁰⁸ Checkpoints established by the Taliban in Baghlan-e Jadid district were obstructing traffic to the north, although civilians were reportedly allowed to pass.⁹⁰⁹ Telecommunications and road movements were intermittently disrupted.⁹¹⁰ Local sources described to AAN how people's lives were impacted by the events, with schools and shops closed, electricity and water cut off and a sharp increase in food prices.⁹¹¹

In October 2019, shopkeepers complained about insecurity due to Taliban presence and daily firing in the city impacting their businesses in Pul-e Khumri.⁹¹²

Taliban presence led to regular attacks, fighting and security operations during the reporting period in some areas of Pul-e Khumri, such as Dand-e Ghorī (not to confuse with Dahana-e Ghuri district, also in Baghlan province) in April, July, October and December 2019⁹¹³, Chashma-e Sher in July 2019⁹¹⁴ or Dand-e Shahabuddin in October 2019.⁹¹⁵ A large-scale operation reportedly resulted in the displacement of thousands of families from Dand-e Ghorī and Dand-e Shahabuddin areas in October 2019.⁹¹⁶

2.4.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA regularly reported how continued clashes between AGEs and the ANDSF in Baghlan caused displacement in the reporting period.⁹¹⁷

⁹⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pul-e-Khumri Flash Update No.3, 3 September 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Highways Remain Closed As Clashes Continue In Baghlan, 2 September 2019, [url](#); Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁵ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 27-28

⁹⁰⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians, military personnel among 63 killed in Baghlan clashes, 2 September 2019, [url](#);

UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (26 August – 1 September 2019), 4 September 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pul-e-Khumri Flash Update No.3, 3 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's shadow governor among 43 rebels killed in Baghlan, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁸ Tolonews, Baghlan Clashes Enter Sixth Day, 6 September 2019, [url](#); See also: UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Flash Update 2 – Lull in armed clashes in Kunduz city and new clashes in Pul-e-Khumri, 1 September 2019, [url](#); Xinhua, Afghan fighting gets intensified amid reported progress in U.S.-Taliban talks, 9 September 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Trump cancels Taliban talks: What does it mean for Afghanistan?, 8 September 2019, [url](#); Kabul Press, US Peace Talk with the Taliban Is Talibanization of Afghanistan, 3 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁰⁹ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹¹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (26 August – 1 September 2019), 4 September 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Special Forces Launch Clearance Operations In Baghlan, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹¹¹ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹¹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Growing insecurity worries Baghlan shopkeepers, 13 October 2019, [url](#)

⁹¹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan: 371 displaced families in need of urgent assistance, 4 April 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 security personnel killed, 14 injured in Baghlan attack, 3 July 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Massive operations launched against Taliban in Baghlan, 17 October 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 22 rebels eliminated in Helmand, Baghlan operations, 24 December 2019, [url](#)

⁹¹⁴ Khaama press, Special Forces rescue 2 oil tanker drivers, kill 5 Taliban militants in Baghlan, 18 July 2019, [url](#)

⁹¹⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Massive operations launched against Taliban in Baghlan, 17 October 2019, [url](#)

⁹¹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan IDPs in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

⁹¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 September 2019), 25 September 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 - 29 September 2019), 2 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 September – 6 October 2019), 9 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 October – 27 October 2019), 30 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 – 10 November 2019), 13 November 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (11 – 17 November 2019), 21 November 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 November - 1 December 2019), 4 December 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (2 December – 8 December 2019), 11 December 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (9 December – 15 December 2019), 18 December 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 December - 29 December 2019), 31 December 2019, [url](#);

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 46 669 persons displaced by conflict from Baghlan province, 93 % of whom were displaced within the province itself. The largest displacement occurred in Pul-e Khumri district, especially in September 2019, after the Taliban had launched an offensive on the provincial capital.⁹¹⁸ Thousands of people were displaced from Burka in April and July 2019, from Baghlan-e Jadid, mainly in October 2019, from Nahrin, mainly in September 2019 and from Guzargah-e Nur districts in October and December 2019. Nearly all IDPs from Burka and Nahrin districts were displaced within the respective districts, while the people displaced in October 2019 from Baghlan-e Jadid sought refuge in Pul-e Khumri and all IDPs from Guzargah-e Nur were displaced to Taloqan in Takhar province.⁹¹⁹ In the last days of June 2020, UNOCHA noted the ‘most significant displacement since March 2020’ in three north-eastern provinces, including Baghlan.⁹²⁰

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 43 428 persons displaced by conflict to Baghlan province, all displaced within the province. Pul-e Khumri hosted 80 % of all IDPs, most from within the district and a large group from Baghlan-e Jadid in October 2019. Other districts hosting people displaced to Baghlan province in the reporting period, were Burka, Nahrin and Baghlan-e Jadid. All or nearly all of the people displaced to those districts came from within the respective districts.⁹²¹

UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 December 2019 - 5 January 2020), 8 January 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 January - 12 January 2019), 15 January 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (10 February – 16 February 2020), 19 February 2020, [url](#)

⁹¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#); See also: UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (26 August – 1 September 2019), 4 September 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pul-e-Khumri Flash Update No.3, 3 September 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 - 29 September 2019), 2 October 2019, [url](#)

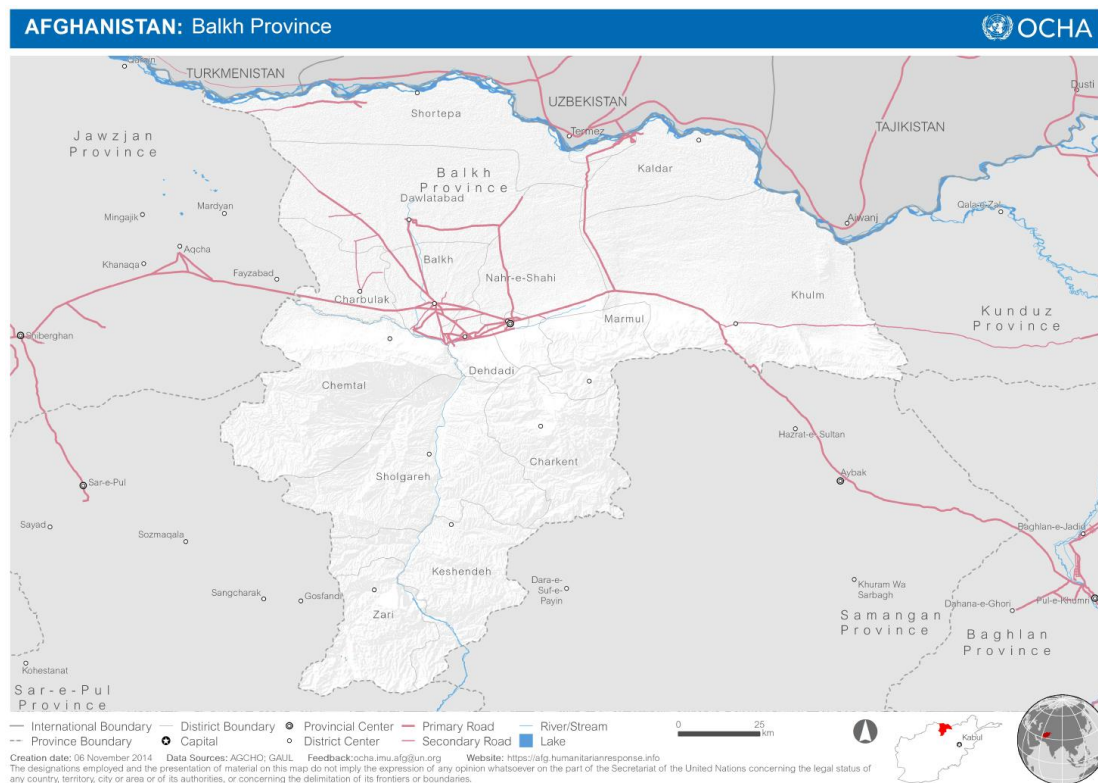
⁹¹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

⁹²⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 June – 28 June 2020), 1 July 2020, [url](#)

⁹²¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

2.5 Balkh

2.5.1 General description of the province



Map 5: Afghanistan – Balkh province, source: UNOCHA⁹²²

Balkh province is located in the northern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Kunduz and Baghlan provinces to the east, Samangan province to the south-east, Sar-e Pul province to the south-west, Jawzjan province to the west and an international border with Uzbekistan to the north and Tajikistan to the north-east and Turkmenistan to the north-west.⁹²³ Balkh province is divided into the following administrative units: Balkh, Charbulak, Charkent, Chemtal, Dawlatabad, Dehdadi, Kaldar, Keshendeh, Khulm, Marmul, Mazar-e Sharif, Nahr-e Shahi, Sholgareh, Shortepa and Zari. The provincial capital is Mazar-e Sharif.⁹²⁴

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1 509 183, approximately 484 492 of whom live in the provincial capital, Mazar-e Sharif.⁹²⁵ Balkh is an ethnically diverse province. It is inhabited by Pashtun, Uzbek, Hazara, Tajik, Turkmen, Aimaq, Baloch⁹²⁶ and Sunni Hazara (Kawshi) communities.⁹²⁷

Balkh – and more specifically Mazar-e Sharif – is an import/export hub as well as a regional trading centre.⁹²⁸ A map provided by the Ministry of Finance and used by the Diplomat shows a highway leading to the Uzbek border crossing point Hairatan-Termiz branching off the Ring Road east of Mazar-e Sharif. Furthermore, a highway connecting Balkh to Bamyan in the centre of Afghanistan is under

⁹²² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Balkh Province- District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

⁹²³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014, [url](#); GADM, Afghanistan [Map], 2018, [url](#)

⁹²⁴ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Balkh, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 31

⁹²⁵ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 31

⁹²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Balkh, n.d., [url](#)

⁹²⁷ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Balkh Provincial Review, n.d., [url](#)

⁹²⁸ Samuel Hall, Economic Assessment and Labour Market Survey of Mazar-i Sharif, Pul-i Khumri, Kandahar City and Kunduz City, 16 January 2017, [url](#), p. 43

construction, according to that map.⁹²⁹ Mazar-e Sharif has an airport with scheduled passenger services to national and international destinations.⁹³⁰ In January 2019, an air corridor connecting Mazar-e Sharif and Europe via Turkey was opened for cargo flights.⁹³¹

According to the UNODC Opium Survey of 2018, Balkh ranks 7th among the ten main opium poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan. Because of a drought, poppy cultivation decreased by 30 % in the province in 2018 compared to 2017.⁹³²

2.5.2 Conflict background and actors in Balkh

Up until early 2019 Balkh was usually described as one of the relatively calm and most stable provinces of Afghanistan⁹³³, largely due to a monopoly on power by the former warlord Atta Mohammed Noor, who was governor of Balkh for more than a decade.⁹³⁴ Even after Noor's resignation in 2018 his influence in the province continued to be strong.⁹³⁵ Atta Noor's militiamen formed most of the provincial police force.⁹³⁶ However, a representative of an international organisation who met with the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) in Kabul in January 2020 saw Noor's forced resignation as a contributing factor to the worsening security situation in Balkh.⁹³⁷ According to Afghan news portals Tolonews and Pajhwok Afghan News, the tensions between the President and Noor around Noor's resignation were followed by an increased presence of armed men in Mazar-e Sharif, which allegedly had links to political parties and members of parliament.⁹³⁸ Subsequently, criminal activities such as armed robberies, murder, clashes, and kidnapping increased in Balkh's capital in early 2018⁹³⁹ and remained a source of concern for Balkh's residents in 2019⁹⁴⁰, prompting the police to take action against unregistered vehicles and motorcycles increasingly involved in crimes or to introduce a ban on the use of motorbikes.⁹⁴¹

Compared to other northern regions, the Taliban have a much smaller presence in Balkh, according to a 2019 Reuters article.⁹⁴² Nevertheless their influence reportedly increased in 2019⁹⁴³ and there were reports of Taliban activity in nearly all of Balkh's districts. Attacks by the Taliban special forces, known as the Red Unit forces, were reported in Khulm district in May 2019⁹⁴⁴ and in Charkent district in

⁹²⁹ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

⁹³⁰ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019; Ariana Airlines, Flights schedule, n.d., [url](#)

⁹³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Mazar-i-Sharif-Turkey-Europe air corridor formally opens, 9 January 2019, [url](#)

⁹³² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 6, 17

⁹³³ Reuters, Gunfight erupts in north Afghan city over police chief's appointment, 14 March 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Taliban Planning To Disrupt Balkh Security: Police Chief, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

⁹³⁴ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#); RFE/RL, Powerful Afghan Governor Resigns, Ending Standoff With Ghani, 22 March 2018, [url](#); Ruttig, T., "Atta for President" Again? The struggle for the Afghan presidency and Jamiat's leadership, AAN, 10 April 2017, [url](#)

⁹³⁵ Reuters, Gunfight erupts in north Afghan city over police chief's appointment, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹³⁶ RFE/RL, Rival Police Clash In North Afghan City In Spat Between President, Ex-Governor, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹³⁷ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 46

⁹³⁸ Tolonews, Illegal Armed Men 'A Big Challenge For Balkh Residents', 12 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 injured as gunmen loyal to MPs clash in Balkh, 28 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal armed men threaten Mazar-i-Sharif security, 22 May 2018, [url](#)

⁹³⁹ Tolonews, Illegal Armed Men 'A Big Challenge For Balkh Residents', 12 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal gunmen seen behind insecurity in Mazar-i-Sharif, 25 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 injured as gunmen loyal to MPs clash in Balkh, 28 January 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Mazar-i-Sharif garrison failing to bar illegal gunmen: Residents, 7 March 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal armed men threaten Mazar-i-Sharif security, 22 May 2018, [url](#); Tolonews, Mazar Man Killed For His Motorcycle, 22 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Increasing crime incidents worry Balkh dwellers, 26 October 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁴¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Undocumented vehicles, bikes being seized in Balkh, 27 October 2019, [url](#); Kilid Group (The), Unknown Gunmen Kill 3 Employees of Private Company in Balkh Province, 28 June 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁴² Reuters, Gunfight erupts in north Afghan city over police chief's appointment, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁴³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's influence, insecurity grow in Balkh, 18 August 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#)

February 2020.⁹⁴⁵ In May 2020, a Sar-e Pul provincial council member mentioned the Taliban running checkpoints in various villages of Zari district, on the road towards Mazar-e Sharif.⁹⁴⁶

As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Dawlatabad district as ‘Taliban-controlled’, Charbulak, Chemtal and Zari districts as ‘contested’ and the remaining districts in Balkh province as ‘government-controlled’⁹⁴⁷, including Keshنده, a district that the New York Times reported to be under Taliban control in December 2019.⁹⁴⁸

Local officials and first Vice President Gen. Dostum claimed in December 2019 that ISKP had increased its influence in all provinces of the northern region, including Balkh, in the previous months.⁹⁴⁹ However, no security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Balkh between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.⁹⁵⁰

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Balkh province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps⁹⁵¹ that has its headquarters in Dehdadi district of the province.⁹⁵² Primarily present at bases in Kabul and Bagram, the US forces maintained regional hubs as of 30 April 2020, including in Balkh province in the north. Balkh province is included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif.⁹⁵³

Members of pro-government militias or so-called Arbakis (the term ‘Arbaki’ is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias) and local uprising commander forces are present in Balkh province and regular targets of Taliban attacks.⁹⁵⁴

2.5.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.5.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 277 civilian casualties (108 deaths and 169 injured) in Balkh. This represents an increase of 22 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by non-suicide IEDs and targeted killings.⁹⁵⁵ In the first half of 2020, UNAMA ranked Balkh province first in terms of civilians most affected by the conflict, documenting 344 civilian casualties in the province.⁹⁵⁶ Resolute Support recorded between 102 and 150 civilian casualties in

⁹⁴⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁶ Ruttig, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balkhab District: Are the Taleban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁷ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated. For more information on the methodology used by, see the [Introduction](#) section of this report.

⁹⁴⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁴⁹ Tolonews, Large-scale Military Operation To Launch in North: Dostum, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁹⁵¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 50

⁹⁵² Tolonews, 209 Shaheen Corps: The Base The Taliban Attacked, 22 April 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵³ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 3; 14

⁹⁵⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 dead, 5 injured as Balkh commanders clash, 8 May 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁵⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

⁹⁵⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

Balkh in the first half of 2020, reporting similar numbers of civilian casualties between the first and second quarter of 2020.⁹⁵⁷

ACLED collected data on 811 violent events in Balkh province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 631 of which were coded as 'battles', 162 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 18 as 'violence against civilians'.⁹⁵⁸ The security situation in Balkh province has been deteriorating in 2019⁹⁵⁹ and according to UN data, Balkh province was one of the four most active areas of conflict in the first months of 2020.⁹⁶⁰ With 195 incidents, Balkh stood out as the district where ACLED recorded most violent events between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, followed by Chemtal and Charbulak districts, with more than 140 incidents each. Other districts where ACLED recorded over 40 incidents, were Sholgara and Dawlatabad and Zari. No violent events were registered by ACLED in Marmul district.⁹⁶¹

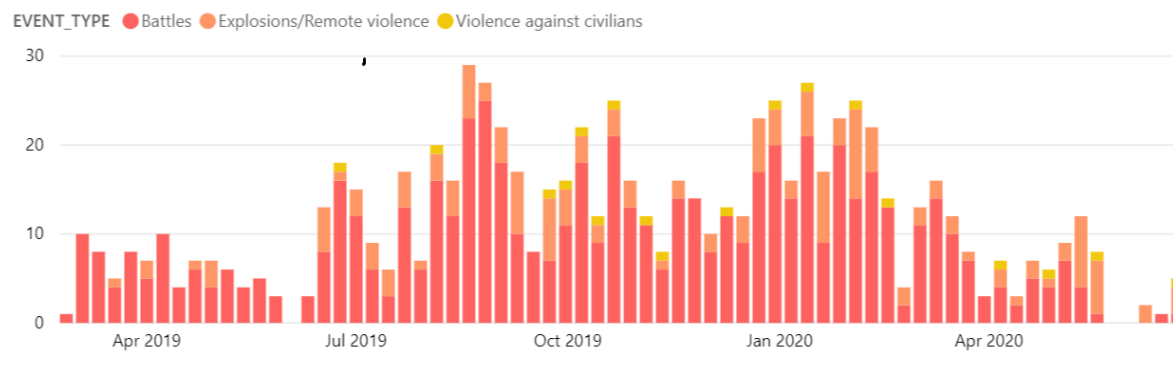


Figure 7. Balkh - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data⁹⁶²

ACLED coded 78 % of the violent incidents in Balkh province as 'battles', nearly all 'armed clashes'.⁹⁶³ The majority of those armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police, ANA soldiers or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias⁹⁶⁴ or attacks on

⁹⁵⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

⁹⁵⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁹⁵⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's influence, insecurity grow in Balkh, 18 August 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁰ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/753-S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 5; UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/897-S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁶¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁹⁶² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Balkh, [url](#)

⁹⁶³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁹⁶⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Eight Policemen Killed As Clashes Intensity In North, 2 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

military or police facilities such as checkpoints⁹⁶⁵ and bases⁹⁶⁶ and on convoys⁹⁶⁷ and vehicles.⁹⁶⁸ These incidents at times resulted in civilian casualties, as for example in Sawrian village in Charbulak district on 3 August 2019⁹⁶⁹, in the Alamkhel area of Balkh district on 17 March 2020⁹⁷⁰, or in the Maidan Hawai area of Dawlatatabd district on 14 May 2020.⁹⁷¹ Attacks by the Taliban on government officials and employees were also included under armed clashes by ACLED.⁹⁷² On 30 March 2019, the Taliban attacked a convoy carrying First Vice-President Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum on the Mazar-Shiberghan Highway which connects Balkh and Jowzjan provinces. Gen. Dostum escaped unhurt, but there were casualties among his entourage.⁹⁷³ On 14 September 2019, the Taliban ambushed the Labour and Social Affairs Director for northern Balkh province on the highway between Balkh district and Mazar-e Sharif.⁹⁷⁴

Operations, such as Operation Walid 40 launched in March 2019⁹⁷⁵, Operation Khalid⁹⁷⁶ in April 2019 and Operation Shaheen 611 in April 2020⁹⁷⁷ and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs⁹⁷⁸ were also registered under battles by ACLED. Most of those were carried out in August 2019 and January 2020.⁹⁷⁹ Some of these operations were backed by air strikes, for example in Chemtal district in March and August 2019 or in Charbulak in June and July 2019.⁹⁸⁰

The Taliban attacked security outposts briefly capturing them before they were retaken by security forces in Zari district in March and May 2019⁹⁸¹ and in Charkent district on 3 July 2019.⁹⁸² Afghan officials rejected claims by the Taliban of having captured Zari district in September 2019, stating that

⁹⁶⁵ RFE/RL, Seven Afghan Soldiers Killed In Taliban Attack, 24 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 police killed, 6 wounded in Balkh firefight, 9 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁶ RFE/RL, Suicide Car Bomb Hits Afghan Army Compound, 26 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Local Taliban commanders among 16 killed, wounded in Balkh and Jawzjan clashes, 25 November 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-july 4, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁶⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁹⁷³ Tolonews, Dostum Unhurt As His Convoy Attacked By Taliban, 30 March 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Vice President Dostum Survives Convoy Ambush, 30 March 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan Vice President Survives Attack on Convoy, 31 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Dostum's convoy attacked in Balkh, bodyguard killed, 30 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh official injured in Taliban attack, 14 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁵ Tolonews, Over 3,700 Militants Killed In 88 Operations In North: Official, 19 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan armed forces launch Walid-40 operations in Balkh province, 12 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁶ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/902-S/2019/493 14 June 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁹⁷⁷ Tolonews, '17 Villages Cleared of Taliban' in Balkh: Police, 29 April 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Notorious Taliban commander killed in Balkh operation, 16 May 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban's most dangerous commander Mullah Khadem killed in Balkh province, 16 May 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁷⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁹⁸⁰ Khaama Press, Dozens of Taliban militants killed in latest Special Forces operations, airstrikes, 14 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 3 Taliban militants killed, 2 detained in Balkh and Kunduz provinces, 20 June 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban commander Qari Mehdi among several killed, wounded in Balkh airstrikes, 1 August 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁸¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 29-April 4, 4 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁸² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

the district remained under government control.⁹⁸³ Clashes between pro-government forces and the Taliban in September 2019 resulted in casualties on both sides, including the death of the Taliban's district governor in Zari district.⁹⁸⁴ As a result of an AGE attack on Zari district centre in February 2020 four people were killed and others were injured.⁹⁸⁵ In another Taliban attack in Zari district on 30 April and 1 May 2020, 38 members of local uprising groups were killed or injured.⁹⁸⁶ The Taliban claimed to have overtaken Alamkhail, Baba Yousif, and Boka villages of Balkh district at the end of December 2019.⁹⁸⁷ Heavy fighting was reported from Charbulak district in November 2019 after the Taliban attacked the district centre. As a result, the district police chief and a pro-government militia member were killed.⁹⁸⁸ The district police chief of Shortepa district was also killed in a Taliban attack on the police and district headquarters on 1 October 2019. Five other police officers were also killed and fifteen were taken prisoners.⁹⁸⁹ Government officials denied the claim by the Taliban that they had overran the compound.⁹⁹⁰ In response to a Taliban attack, Afghan security forces launched an operation called Shaheen 221 in February 2020, during which they managed to clear some vulnerable areas in Chemtal district, such as Pul-e Bangaala village, from the Taliban.⁹⁹¹ Coordinated attacks by the Taliban on Dawlatabad, Balkh and Chemtal districts in March 2020 triggered operations by security forces.⁹⁹²

Clashes between (pro-)government forces and local jihadi commander forces were also reported in Balkh district in May 2019 and caused civilian casualties.⁹⁹³

Air/drone strikes represented 11 % of all reported violent incidents in Balkh between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.⁹⁹⁴ Nearly three out of four air strikes in Balkh province were carried out in following four districts: Chemtal, Charbulak, Balkh and Sholgara. Most air strikes were carried out by Afghan forces, while some were attributed to US forces.⁹⁹⁵ While air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs⁹⁹⁶ and destroyed their facilities or equipment⁹⁹⁷, some also caused civilian casualties such as the air strikes carried out on 25 January 2020 in Boki village of Balkh district during which at least six civilians were killed, when a bomb hit their home.⁹⁹⁸ In May 2020, civilians, reportedly forced by the Taliban to

⁹⁸³ RFE/RL, Afghan Officials: Taliban Suffers Heavy Casualties In Several Provinces, 22 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban claims capturing Zari district in Balkh, 3 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (17 February – 23 February 2020), 26 February 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 38 local uprising members killed, injured in Zari clash, 1 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh: District police chief killed in Taliban attack, 6 November 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁸⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁰ AP, Afghan officials: Taliban attack kills at least 11 policemen, 1 October 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁹¹ Tolonews, 'Vulnerable' Areas in Chamtal Cleared of Taliban: Army, 8 February 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh: 2 tanks torched in Dawlatabad firefight, 20 March 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, 25 Taliban militants killed, 33 wounded in Balkh clashes, 24 March 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁹³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 dead, 5 injured as Balkh commanders clash, 8 May 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁴ These do not include air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under 'battles'. For more information on ACLED's methodology, please consult the introduction.

⁹⁹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

⁹⁹⁶ NYT, Dozens Killed as Taliban Bombs in 4 Humvees Rip Through Afghan District, 30 June 2019, [url](#); Khaama press, 8 Taliban militants killed in an airstrike of the Afghan Air Force in Balkh province, 4 April 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's district chiefs, commanders killed in Balkh, 30 June 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Car bomb destroyed; 15 Taliban militants killed in Balkh operations, 17 August 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban chief for Chamtal district killed in airstrike, 7 February 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 16 insurgents killed in Balkh air raid, says army, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁷ Khaama Press, 49 Taliban militants killed, wounded; strategic compound destroyed in Balkh, 9 September 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Notorious Taliban commander, his fighters killed in Balkh before disrupting elections, 28 September 2019, [url](#); Khaama press, Video: Airstrike destroys key Taliban compound in Balkh province, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁸ RFE/RL, Afghan Officials Say Four Children, Three Women Killed In Air Strikes, 26 January 2020, [url](#); NYT, Despite Calm in Afghan Cities, War in Villages Kills Dozens Daily, 29 January 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update

destroy a main road in Balkh district in order to obstruct government forces, were killed and wounded by air strikes.⁹⁹⁹ In the first half of 2020, UNAMA documented more than half of all civilian casualties as a result of Afghan Air Force air strikes in Kunduz and Balkh provinces.¹⁰⁰⁰

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs – sometimes VB-IEDs¹⁰⁰¹ or pressure plate IEDs¹⁰⁰² – to target security forces¹⁰⁰³ or government officials¹⁰⁰⁴, represented 7 % of all reported security incidents in Balkh between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.¹⁰⁰⁵ Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians.¹⁰⁰⁶ This happened for example on 15 July 2019, in Charbulak district when an IED went off while children were playing in the area killing two of them¹⁰⁰⁷, or on 18 August 2019, when a civilian vehicle hit a roadside bomb in Dawlat Abad district. At least 10 civilians, nearly all members of the same family, were reported to have died.¹⁰⁰⁸

Mortars fired by Afghan forces in Zari district in January and February 2020 and rockets fired by the Taliban in Chemtal district in March 2020 caused civilian casualties.¹⁰⁰⁹

Eighteen incidents categorised by ACLED as violence against civilians included the killing of off-duty police personnel¹⁰¹⁰, the abduction and killing of civilians by the Taliban on 7 April 2020 in Sholgareh district¹⁰¹¹ and the killing of civilians in operations by security forces, as reported by the Taliban.¹⁰¹² These incidents represented 2 % of all violent events in Balkh province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.¹⁰¹³ In addition to the incidents registered by ACLED, UNAMA documented the abduction of five fuel truck drivers by the Taliban at one of their checkpoints in Charbulak district on 11 October 2019 until their company paid AFN 30 000 per tanker.¹⁰¹⁴

(27 January – 2 February 2020), 5 February 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 of a family killed in Balkh airstrike, residents claim, 26 January 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁹⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 9 ‘Civilians Killed’ in Govt Airstrike in Balkh: Residents, 12 May 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁰⁰⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁰⁰¹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Bomb Blast In Northern Afghanistan Kills One Civilian, Wounds Two Others, 4 January 2020, [url](#); UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/753–S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰⁰² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 42

¹⁰⁰³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 soldiers suffer casualties in Balkh attack, 26 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁷ Khaama Press, Roadside bomb explosion kills 2 children in Balkh province, 15 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁸ RFE/RL, Afghan President Condemns ‘Barbaric’ Attack On Wedding Party, 18 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 civilians killed in Balkh roadside bombing, 18 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰¹⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰¹¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban abduct, slay 8 civilians in Balkh, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰¹² Voice of Jihad, War crimes of the internal enemies (May 2020), 5 June 2020, [url](#); Voice of Jihad, War crimes of the foreign occupying forces and their internal mercenaries (November 2019), 4 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰¹³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 49

UNAMA notes a consistent pattern in the use of civilian locations by AGEs when carrying out their attacks in Afghanistan, which exposes civilians to risks of attack by pro-government forces. Illustrating this, UNAMA documented a ground engagement in Chemtal district in March 2019, when the Afghan National Army fired a mortar round towards Taliban fighters who were hiding in residential homes. The mortar landed on a civilian home, killing three civilians including a six-year old boy, and injuring three children.¹⁰¹⁵ Another example was an attack on a convoy of Afghan security forces on 23 June 2019, during which Taliban fighters were hiding in shops in a bazaar in Balkh district. As a result of the government forces' response to the attack, two civilians, including a child, were killed.¹⁰¹⁶ While fleeing after having attacked the police headquarters and the district governor's office in Zari district on 1 May 2020, the Taliban tried to hide in civilian houses and killed a civilian who refused to open the door.¹⁰¹⁷

There were reports from the northern region, which includes Balkh province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019.¹⁰¹⁸ However, in contrast to other northern provinces, AAN did not observe a telecommunication ban in Balkh. In some districts not all networks were active.¹⁰¹⁹ The election campaign office of President Ghani was attacked by unidentified gunmen on 1 September 2019.¹⁰²⁰ After a security meeting in advance of the elections the Independent Election Commission announced that 33 polling centres, located in Chemtal, Charbulak, Dawlatabad, Shortepa en Sholgareh districts, would not open on election day.¹⁰²¹

Balkh was one of the four main provinces in Afghanistan where ANDSF invested in improving security along the major roads in the third quarter of 2019.¹⁰²² There were reports of increased insecurity along the Mazar-Shiberghan Highway in August 2019.¹⁰²³ The Taliban reportedly often established checkpoints along the highway, making travelling for government employees difficult.¹⁰²⁴ Security incidents along the Mazar-Shiberghan Highway were reported in March¹⁰²⁵, April¹⁰²⁶ and October 2019¹⁰²⁷ and continued to be reported in 2020¹⁰²⁸, including during the week of reduction in violence at the end of February 2020 agreed between the Taliban and the United States.¹⁰²⁹ Protesters blocked the Mazar-Shiberghan Highway in June 2019 after to children were killed and two civilians were injured in a security operation on that highway.¹⁰³⁰

Within the framework of its attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) did not register such attacks in Balkh province in 2019.¹⁰³¹ On 9 July 2019, the Taliban attacked a police checkpoint, that had been providing security for a hospital in Dawlat Abad district. One police officer

¹⁰¹⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 51

¹⁰¹⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰¹⁹ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (13): Observations from Kandahar, Takhar, Wardak and Balkh, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghani's campaign office attacked in Balkh, 1 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰²¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 33 polling sites to stay shut in Balkh on Election Day, 14 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰²² UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/990-S/2019/703, 3 September 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-6

¹⁰²³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 - 11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 - 25 August 2019), 27 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁴ Tolonews, Taliban Planning To Disrupt Balkh Security: Police Chief, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 5-11, 11 April 2019, [url](#); Xinhua, Gov't forces kill 7 militants in N. Afghanistan, 30 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 highway police personnel killed in Balkh assault, 1 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰²⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, At Least Six Killed In Afghanistan Despite 'Reduction Of Violence' Deal, 24 February 2020, [url](#); KUNA, Taliban attacks kill 15 security men in N. Afghanistan, 1 January 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (24 February – 1 March 2020), 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh protestors close road after forces kill 2 children, 22 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰³¹ WHO, Afghanistan, Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019 [url](#)

was killed, another was wounded.¹⁰³² UNAMA recorded the looting of medical supplies by ANA in Zari district on 26 April 2020. The medical supplies belonged to an NGO, accused by the ANA of supporting the Taliban with those supplies.¹⁰³³

Education personnel from various districts in Balkh province, backed by the provincial council head, complained in August 2019 to Afghan news agency Pajhwok about ongoing conflict and clashes impacting the education process and school attendance. The Balkh Education Director, however, confirmed increasing insecurity in some districts but claimed no serious problems were reported.¹⁰³⁴

In June 2020, through its Twitter account, the Kabul-based news service Reportedly cited residents of Balkh district saying that the Taliban blocked access to water and communication networks in the district.¹⁰³⁵

The conflict pattern in Mazar-e Sharif district, which includes the provincial capital, was different from the general pattern in Balkh province and in its different districts. Also Mazar-e Sharif was one of the districts in Balkh province where a lower number of incidents were reported.¹⁰³⁶

ACLED registered 19 violent incidents in Mazar-e Sharif district between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 representing around 2 % of all violent events recorded by ACLED in Balkh province in that period. While ACLED categorised at least 65 % of the violent incidents in the different districts of Balkh province as battles, in Mazar-e Sharif this event type represented 37 % of all violent incidents.¹⁰³⁷

Over half of the reported violent incidents in Mazar-e Sharif were landmine or IED explosions, whereas in the other districts that type of incidents represented under 25 % and in most districts even under 10 % of all violent incidents. No air strikes were reported in Mazar-e Sharif.¹⁰³⁸ At least 18 people, including civilians, were injured when an IED attached to a bicycle exploded at one of the busiest intersections in Mazar-e Sharif on 17 December 2019.¹⁰³⁹ A magnetic IED detonated near a public bathhouse in PD10 of Mazar-e Sharif on 4 January 2020, killing one civilian and wounding three others.¹⁰⁴⁰ On 14 January 2020, an explosion in PD9 of Mazar-e Sharif City, reportedly in front of the residence of the Balkh district governor, killed two children. This was followed by another explosion wounding at least seven civilians.¹⁰⁴¹

The two incidents of violence against civilians registered by ACLED in Mazar-e Sharif¹⁰⁴², included the beheading of a 9-year old girl on 30 September 2019 and the killing of a religious scholar on

¹⁰³² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰³³ UNAMA, Special Report: Attacks On Healthcare During The Covid-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, [url](#), p.12

¹⁰³⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh students stop attending lessons as violence rages, 27 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁵ Reportedly, [Twitter], posted on 11 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰³⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁰³⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁰³⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁰³⁹ Khaama Press, Explosion injures 18 civilians in Balkh province of Afghanistan 17 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians among 22 injured in Mazar-i-Sharif blast, 17 December 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Roadside Bomb Kills 10 From Same Afghan Family, 17 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 killed, 3 wounded as blast rocks Mazar-i-Sharif, 4 January 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, One Civilian Killed in IED Explosion in Balkh, 4 January 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, 4 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴¹ AP, Afghan official: Bombs kill 2 children in northern province, 14 January 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 children killed, 8 civilians wounded in Balkh blasts, 14 January 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

12 October 2019 by unidentified armed men.¹⁰⁴³ In addition Pajhwok reported on the killing of a primary court judge by unidentified armed men in PD 10 of the city on 8 August 2019.¹⁰⁴⁴

Mazar-e Sharif was the scene of clashes in the context of political disputes and powerplay in the reporting period. On 14 March 2019, gunfire broke out between militia fighters loyal to former Governor Mohammad Atta Noor and Interior Ministry forces sent to escort and support the new provincial police chief, appointed by President Ashraf Ghani. As a result more than a dozen people, police officers as well as civilians, were wounded.¹⁰⁴⁵ A clash between local police and local jihadi commanders on 7 May 2019 resulted in two people, including one civilian, being killed and five people, including three civilians, being wounded.¹⁰⁴⁶ On 14 December 2019, heavy fighting erupted and lasted for nearly 24 hours between Afghan security forces and fighters loyal to local militia commander and former police chief for Faryab, Nizamuddin Qaisary.¹⁰⁴⁷ The battle caused residents to flee the neighbourhood, while the two sides were shelling each other.¹⁰⁴⁸ Nearby civilian houses were damaged.¹⁰⁴⁹

Presidential election day, on 28 September 2019, was a quiet day in Mazar-e Sharif, with little visible security measures and no visible checkpoints. Despite the fact that sources described the situation in the city as secure, allowing the people in the city to go out to vote, turnout was low compared to previous elections.¹⁰⁵⁰

Sources consulted by Landinfo during its fact-finding mission at the end of October 2019, were of the opinion that the security situation in Mazar-e Sharif had worsened in 2019, compared to 2018, but attributed this mainly to crime and to a small extent to conflict-related violence.¹⁰⁵¹ Residents of Mazar-e Sharif complained to Pajhwok in 2019 and 2020 about a worsening security situation and increasing crime in the city, mentioning the presence of illegal armed men who were involved in robberies, murders and chaos.¹⁰⁵²

2.5.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 22 253 persons displaced from Balkh province, more than 99 % of whom were displaced within the province itself.¹⁰⁵³ Most were displaced from Zari, mostly in July and September 2019 and March 2020, due to conflict, heavy fighting between security forces and the Taliban and air-and-ground operations against the Taliban¹⁰⁵⁴ and from Sholgarah, in particular in May 2020 and also in July and August 2019, when security operations were reported.¹⁰⁵⁵ Large groups were displaced from Chemtal district, especially in

¹⁰⁴³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Primary court judge gunned down in Balkh, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁵ RFE/RL, Rival Police Clash In North Afghan City In Spat Between President, Ex-Governor, 14 March 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Gunfight erupts in north Afghan city over police chief's appointment, 14 March 2019, [url](#); AP, Afghans probe US mistaken airstrike of Afghan army base, 14 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh: Gunfire erupts after talks on new police chief fail, 14 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, BREAKING: Government storms a warlord's home with Helicopter gunships in northern Balkh province as he refuses to surrender to security forces, 15 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁸ NYT, Afghan Warlord Escapes Arrest as Troops Turn City Into a War Zone, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴⁹ Tolonews, Fight To Arrest Qaisari in Mazar-e-Sharif Ongoing, 15 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁰ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (13): Observations from Kandahar, Takhar, Wardak and Balkh, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵¹ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan. Sikkerhetssituasjonen i Balkhprovinsen i 2019, 6 April 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁰⁵² Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh police taking action against illegal armed men: Chief, 10 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh police record over 800 crimes in six months, 7 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban claims capturing Zari district in Balkh, 3 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Shadow district chief among 8 Taliban killed in Balkh, 22 September 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (24 February – 1 March 2020), 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's influence, insecurity grow in Balkh, 18 August 2019, [url](#)

July 2019 and February 2020, when ACLED registered most violent incidents there¹⁰⁵⁶, from Charbulak district, in particular in April 2019 and from Dawlatabad, mostly in February 2020. People were also displaced from Nahr-e Shahi district in September 2019, due to attacks by AGEs around election day¹⁰⁵⁷ and from Shortepa district in January 2020 due to military operations in that district.¹⁰⁵⁸ The majority of the IDPs from different districts in Balkh province were displaced to Nahr-e Shahi district or to Mazar-e Sharif. Although insecurity and fighting reportedly caused people to flee in Balkh district¹⁰⁵⁹, only seven IDPs were registered by UNOCHA from that district in June 2020. UNOCHA also did not register conflict-induced displacement from Mazar-e Sharif district.¹⁰⁶⁰

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 28 987 persons displaced to Balkh province. In addition to the 22 176 people displaced within the province, Balkh also hosted IDPs from Faryab province and to a lesser extent from Jawzjan and Sar-e Pul provinces. Mazar-e Sharif, Nahr-e Shahi, Sholgareh and Charkent were the only districts hosting IDPs in the reporting period. Almost two out of three IDPs displaced to Balkh province were displaced to Nahr-e Shahi district, including all IDPs from Zari district and all IDPs displaced from within the district itself in September 2019. Mazar-e Sharif hosted about one third of all IDPs displaced to Balkh province.¹⁰⁶¹

¹⁰⁵⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁷ ERM (Emergency Response Mechanism), Household Assessment report, 20 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵⁸ UNOCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January – 2 February 2020), 5 February 2020, [url](#)

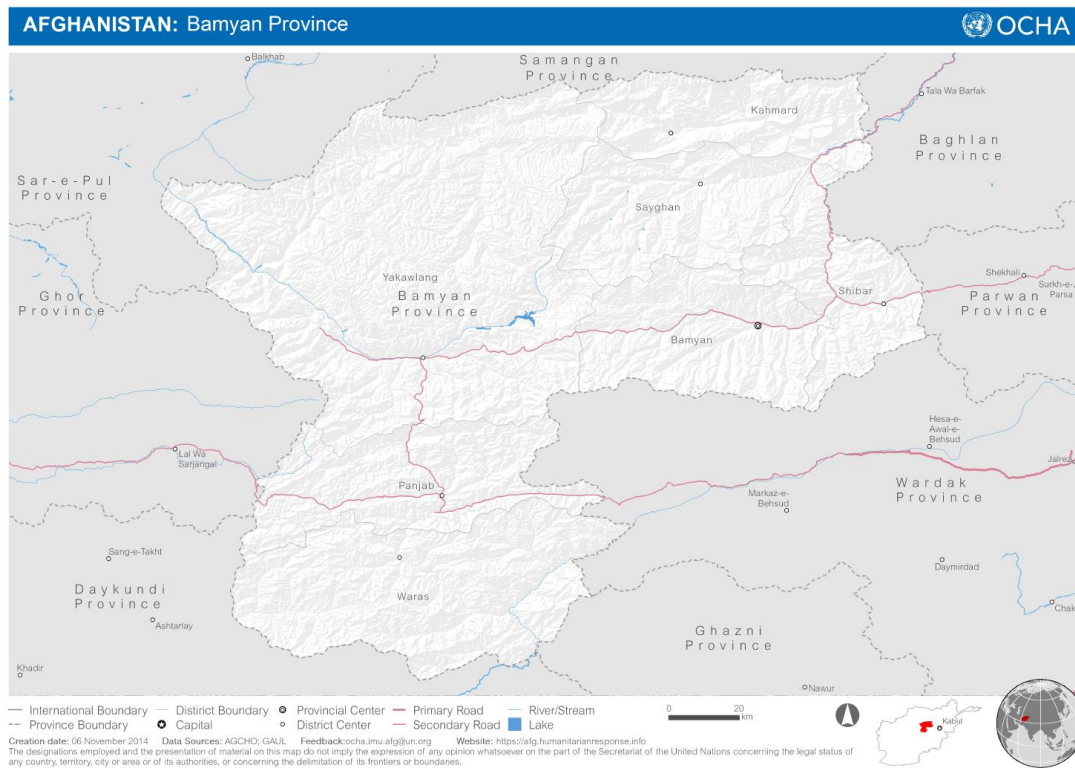
¹⁰⁵⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's influence, insecurity grow in Balkh, 18 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

2.6 Bamyan

2.6.1 General description of the province



Map 6: Afghanistan – Bamyan province, source: UNOCHA¹⁰⁶²

Bamyan province is located in the central highlands region and has borders with the provinces of Samangan to the north, Baghlan and Parwan to the east, Wardak to the south-east, Ghazni and Daykundi to the south, Ghor to the west and Sar-e Pul to the north-west.¹⁰⁶³ Bamyan is situated south of the Hindu Kush and north of the Koh-i Baba mountain ranges.¹⁰⁶⁴ The province is divided into the following administrative units: Bamyan, Kahmard, Panjab, Sayghan, Shibar, Waras and Yakawlang. The provincial capital is Bamyan. Yakawlang Two is mentioned as a separate ‘temporary’ district.¹⁰⁶⁵ According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig, “temporary” districts [...] have been approved after entry into force of the 2004 constitution by the president due to security or other considerations, but have not yet been approved by parliament.¹⁰⁶⁶

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Bamyan province has a population of 495 557.¹⁰⁶⁷ As Bamyan is part of the Hazarajat region¹⁰⁶⁸, referred to as the ‘unofficial Hazara capital’ by Al Jazeera¹⁰⁶⁹, the main ethnic group in the province is Hazara. Other groups present include a minority of Pashtun,

¹⁰⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Bamyan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Bamyan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Bamyan Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁵ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Bamyan, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁰⁶⁶ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good News and Bad News About District Numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁷ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁰⁶⁸ ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan: Informationen zur Volksgruppe der Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed [Query response on Afghanistan: Information on the ethnic group of the Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed)]), 25 October 2017, [url](#); Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶⁹ Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Who Are the Hazaras?, 27 June 2016, [url](#)

Tajik, and Sayed/Sadat.¹⁰⁷⁰ According to various sources quoted in a query response of ACCORD, Bamyan's Sayeds are mostly Hazaras, though they distinguish themselves from other Hazaras, and are traditionally part of the Hazara religious and political elite.¹⁰⁷¹ Approximately 90 % of Bamyan's residents are Shias.¹⁰⁷²

In March 2016, Kam Air initiated direct commercial flights between Kabul and Bamyan¹⁰⁷³, with flights operating several times a week.¹⁰⁷⁴ By road, Bamyan can be reached from Kabul either by the Kabul-Bamyan Highway, via Wardak province, or by the Ghorband Valley, via Parwan province.¹⁰⁷⁵ Bamyan province is planned to be connected to neighbouring Baghlan province via the Baghlan to Bamyan (B2B) Road in 2022.¹⁰⁷⁶

Bamyan is reportedly one of Afghanistan's poorest provinces, '[...] often lacking basic facilities and electricity'.¹⁰⁷⁷ Tourism is a source of revenue in the province¹⁰⁷⁸, which has however been impeded by insecurity in neighbouring provinces¹⁰⁷⁹, as well as by the increasing Covid-19 crisis in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁸⁰ According to UNODC's Opium Survey from 2018, Bamyan province remained opium-free in 2018.¹⁰⁸¹ UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52 % reduction in opium-poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region and the central highlands (including Bamyan province).¹⁰⁸²

2.6.2 Conflict background and actors in Bamyan

Certain regions in Afghanistan, like Panjsher province and the area of the central highlands (including Bamyan province¹⁰⁸³), have been described as relatively safe and less affected by conflict-driven violence.¹⁰⁸⁴ According to an Afghan military expert cited by Tolonews, the relative stability of Bamyan as well as Daykundi and Panjsher provinces is related to the social cohesion among its inhabitants, as most of them belong to the same ethnic or tribal group.¹⁰⁸⁵ Bamyan's relative peacefulness has also been attributed to the active involvement of religious leaders in local and governmental peace processes in the province.¹⁰⁸⁶

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated all districts of Bamyan province as

¹⁰⁷⁰ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Bamyan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁷¹ ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan: Informationen zur Volksgruppe der Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed) [Query response on Afghanistan: Information on the ethnic group of the Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed)], 25 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷² Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Bamyan Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰⁷³ Khaama Press, Kam Air Starts Direct Commercial Flights to Bamyan for the First Time, 9 March 2016, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁴ Kam Air, Route Map: Domestic Routes, 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Hajigak Pass Reopens for Traffic, 26 April 2015, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁶ World Bank (The), Trans-Hindukush Road Connectivity Project, 24 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁷ Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Who are the Hazaras?, 27 June 2016, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, More Than 200,000 Tourists Visit Bamyan This Year, 3 September 2017, [url](#); National (The), Coronavirus Shatters Tourism Hopes in Afghanistan's Bamyan Province, 26 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, More Than 200,000 Tourists Visit Bamyan This Year, 3 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁰ National (The), Coronavirus Shatters Tourism Hopes in Afghanistan's Bamyan Province, 26 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸¹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁰⁸² Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸³ Khaama Press, Traditional Dambora Musical Festival Organized in Bamyan Province, 30 June 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Low Turnout, Technical Glitches Mark Afghan Presidential Election, 28 September 2019, [url](#); Reporterly, Challenges of the 2019 Elections: Bamyan, a Province with Heavy Preparedness and Soaring Uncertainty, 31 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁴ DW, Afghanistan: 'A Latent Instability Dominates the Picture', 14 March 2017, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Wants What It Hasn't Been Able to Hold: Hazara Regions, 13 November 2018, [url](#); National (The), Fears of Violence and Fraud Hang over Afghan Presidential Election, 26 September 2019, [url](#); An international organisation Landinfo spoke to in October 2019.

Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 12-13; Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 12, 51

¹⁰⁸⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2017 Causalities: Nearly 25,000 People Killed, Wounded in Afghanistan, 14 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸⁶ UNAMA, Bamyan Religious Scholars Gather to Discuss Peace-Building in Afghanistan, 20 November 2017, [url](#)

‘government-controlled’ or ‘undetermined’.¹⁰⁸⁷ The provincial capital, Bamiyan City, is reported to be under government control.¹⁰⁸⁸ According to an international source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019, the Taliban have no local presence in Bamiyan province. However, infiltration of the Taliban from the neighbouring district of Tala Wa Barfak in Baghlan province has been reported, resulting in attacks at checkpoints and abductions.¹⁰⁸⁹ In September 2019, UNOCHA reported on a ‘tense’ situation in Bamiyan’s districts Kahmard and Shibar due to activities of non-state armed groups.¹⁰⁹⁰ In May 2020, the UN Security Council reported on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made in Bamiyan province.¹⁰⁹¹

According to AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, insecurity in the insurgency-affected Jalrez district of Wardak province has wider ramifications for the security situation in the Hazarajat region (including Bamiyan province), ‘given the importance of passing through Jalrez and the risks that this transit entails’.¹⁰⁹² The Kabul-Bamiyan Highway, often referred to as the Death Road/Valley¹⁰⁹³, has been reported as unsafe.¹⁰⁹⁴ According to two international sources Landinfo spoke to in October 2019, 10 to 15 kilometres on the Kabul-Bamiyan Highway have been controlled by the Taliban for several years.¹⁰⁹⁵ In December 2019, Qaane reported on 20 kilometres of this highway, connecting the Hazarajat region to the Afghan capital, under Taliban control.¹⁰⁹⁶ Roadblocks/checkpoints and IED emplacement by armed opposition groups have been reported¹⁰⁹⁷, as well as people being killed¹⁰⁹⁸, kidnapped¹⁰⁹⁹ (passengers working for the Afghan government, NGOs or international troops) and/or extorted¹¹⁰⁰ by Taliban militants. The victims were mainly Hazaras travelling on this route between Kabul and the Hazarajat region.¹¹⁰¹ 58 % of respondents of the Asia Foundation’s 2019 Survey of the Afghan People in Bamiyan province reported to experience fear while travelling.¹¹⁰² In December 2019, AAN reported on an increasing number of Afghan people taking flights or longer routes to bypass roads situated in contested or Taliban-controlled areas. An NGO employee, cited by AAN, declared to use the Ghorband Valley route (through Parwan province) instead of the road between Maydan Shar and Bamiyan.¹¹⁰³ Truck drivers transporting agricultural produce and other material between Kabul and the Hazarajat

¹⁰⁸⁷ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#) (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)

¹⁰⁸⁸ ERM, AC401-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Bamiyan City, August 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁰⁸⁹ Tolonews, Taliban Attack Police Check Posts in Bamiyan, 30 July 2018, [url](#); Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan:

Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁰⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (9 - 15 September 2019), 15 September 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁹¹ UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9

¹⁰⁹² Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹³ Afghanistan Times, People Ask for Security of Kabul-Bamiyan Highway, 13 September 2019, [url](#); Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁴ Tolonews, Bamiyan Tourism Takes a Knock due to Security Threats on Roads, 28 June 2017, [url](#); National (The), Coronavirus Shatters Tourism Hopes in Afghanistan's Bamiyan Province, 26 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁵ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁰⁹⁶ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁷ ERM, AC401-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Bamiyan City of Bamiyan Province, August 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 31-June 6, 6 June 2019, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, People Ask for Security of Kabul-Bamiyan Highway, 13 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹⁹ Afghanistan Times, People Ask for Security of Kabul-Bamiyan Highway, 13 September 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁰ Tolonews, NDS Chief Says Claims against Alipoor Will Be Investigated, 27 November 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, People Ask for Security of Kabul-Bamiyan Highway, 13 September 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁰¹ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁰² Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 63

¹¹⁰³ Kazemi, S., R., Peace in the Districts (1): A Chasm between High Talks and Local Concerns in Afghanistan, AAN, 11 December 2019, [url](#)

region reportedly use the alternative route through Parwan as well, avoiding tax collection by the Taliban along the Kabul-Bamyan Highway.¹¹⁰⁴

No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP have been recorded in Bamyan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED.¹¹⁰⁵

After the arrest of Hazara militia leader Abdul Ghani Alipur late November 2018, on charges of attacking security forces¹¹⁰⁶, as well as of extortion of passengers by his gunmen on the highway from Maidan Shar to Jalrez and Bamyan¹¹⁰⁷, protests were reported in Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif and Bamyan.¹¹⁰⁸ His supporters claimed that Alipur had not been fighting government forces, but rather the Taliban in parts of Wardak, Ghor and Daykundi provinces.¹¹⁰⁹ Shortly after the protests, Alipur was released from NDS custody.¹¹¹⁰ Alipur's militia is based in the province of Wardak but also operates in other parts of Afghanistan, claiming to help Hazara communities facing security threats.¹¹¹¹

In July 2019, AAN reported on the recruitment of Shia Hazara and Sayed men and boys from Bamyan province by the Iranian-backed Fatemiyun group¹¹¹², to fight in the Syrian war. Afghan officials have expressed concerns that 'Iran may be laying the groundwork for an organised presence of its Fatemiyun proxy in Bamyan, Kabul and the country at large.'¹¹¹³

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Bamyan is under the responsibility of the 203th ANA Corps. Bamyan province is included in the Task Force Southeast (TF-Southeast), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TF-Southeast is led by US forces and has its headquarters in Paktya province.¹¹¹⁴ In November 2018 President Ashraf Ghani ordered the formation of a new 443-strong security unit in Bamyan province, to ensure the protection of (road) construction projects and to conduct special operations.¹¹¹⁵

2.6.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.6.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented five civilian casualties (three deaths and two injured) in Bamyan province. This represents a decrease of 29 % compared to 2018. Leading cause of casualties was explosive remnants of war.¹¹¹⁶ For example in May 2019, three boys were killed in the Dahana-e Ahangaran area, when accidentally setting off an old Soviet bomb while playing.¹¹¹⁷ In March 2020, the UN Secretary General reported Bamyan as the only province to be declared free of landmine

¹¹⁰⁴ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Bamyan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁶ Tolonews, Alipoor Says He Is 'Ready to Hand Over All Weapons', 27 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁷ Tolonews, NDS Chief Says Claims Against Alipoor Will Be Investigated, 27 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁸ Tolonews, Alipoor Says He Is 'Ready to Hand Over All Weapons', 27 November 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader after Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁰⁹ Tolonews, Alipoor Supporters Protest for the Second Day in Kabul, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁰ RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader after Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, [url](#); AP, Afghans Recruited to Fight in Syrian War Struggle Back Home, 1 April 2019, [url](#)

¹¹¹¹ RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader after Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹² 'One of the proxy forces deployed to Syria by the Iranian regime has been the Fatemiyun, a group of thousands of Afghan men who have fought on the side of the Syrian government since 2012-2013. The group has played a small, but not insignificant, role in the conflict in Syria.' (Hamidi, M., The Two Faces of the Fatemiyun (I): Revisiting the Male Fighters, AAN, 8 July 2019, [url](#))

¹¹¹³ Hamidi, M., The Two Faces of the Fatemiyun (I): Revisiting the Male Fighters, AAN, 8 July 2019, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹¹¹⁵ Tolonews, Ghani Orders Formation of New 443-Strong Security Unit in Bamyan Province, 10 November 2018, [url](#)

¹¹¹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹¹¹⁷ NYT, Afghanistan's Curse: A Bomb from 2 Wars Ago Crushes a Family Today, 21 November 2019, [url](#)

contamination, following the work of the only mixed-gender demining team in Afghanistan.¹¹¹⁸ Resolute Support¹¹¹⁹ recorded between 0 and 50 civilian casualties in Bamyan province in the first half of 2020, with no variation between the first and second quarter of the year.¹¹²⁰

ACLED collected data on 15 violent events in Bamyan province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 14 were coded as ‘battles’ and 1 as ‘violence against civilians’. Kahmard in the north-western region of the province stood out as the district where most incidents were reported, with eight incidents recorded. Three incidents were reported in Sayghan district, two in Shibar district and two in Bamyan district, where the provincial capital is located. In the rest of the province, no violent incidents were recorded.¹¹²¹

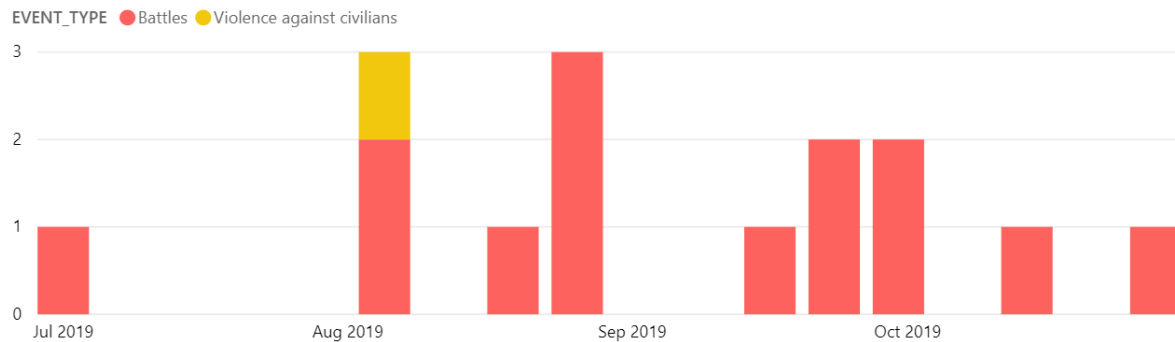


Figure 8. Bamyan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data¹¹²²

All ‘battles’ recorded by ACLED in Bamyan province were categorised as ‘armed clashes’, reported in Kahmard, Sayghan, Shibar and Bamyan districts in the third and fourth quarters of 2019. The majority of these armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military and police personnel as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis* (the term *arbaki* is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias).¹¹²³

The single incident ACLED registered as ‘violence against civilians’ in Bamyan was coded as an incident of sexual violence in Bamyan City.¹¹²⁴ In August 2019, two senior security officials were accused of raping a young woman in the guesthouse of the Bamyan police headquarters.¹¹²⁵

Bamyan’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 represented the second highest of all provinces (after Daykundi province),

¹¹¹⁸ BBC News, Meet the Women on a Mission to Clear Landmines, 20 November 2019, [url](#); UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/74/753–S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹¹¹⁹ Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.

¹¹²⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹¹²¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Bamyan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹¹²² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Bamyan, [url](#)

¹¹²³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Bamyan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹¹²⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Bamyan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹¹²⁵ Khaama Press, Senior Security Officials on the Run after Raping a Young Woman in Bamyan Province, 14 August 2019, [url](#); USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2019 - Afghanistan, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 34

reaching almost 50 %¹¹²⁶ and with a high female turnout reported.¹¹²⁷ However, across the whole province the 2019 voter turnout remained low compared to previous elections.¹¹²⁸ In the Asia Foundation's 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 0-25 % of respondents in Bamyan province reported to have experienced fear while voting.¹¹²⁹ Some voters in Bamyan and Daykundi provinces, who often travel back and forth to Kabul, were reported not to have participated in the elections out of fear of being stopped by the Taliban when passing through Jalrez district in Wardak province.¹¹³⁰ According to AAN, election day in Bamyan province went relatively smoothly. In some of the province's districts such as Kahmard, Sayghan and Shibar, insecurity was reported to have hampered the voter turnout. The polling centre of Sar-e Qundi Baghak in the Imandab area of Shibar district remained closed due to a high security threat and a lack of access routes.¹¹³¹ A Taliban checkpoint was established in the border area with Baghlan's Tala Wa Barfak district on election day.¹¹³² Without providing further details, Agence France Presse (AFP) reported on security incidents on polling day in Bamyan province.¹¹³³ Referring to Taliban source Voice of Jihad, ACLED recorded one incident on election day in Bamyan province, in which Taliban militants attacked several polling centres in Kahmard district, resulting in clashes with Afghan security forces.¹¹³⁴

2.6.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 175 persons displaced from Bamyan province. The majority of IDPs (126 individuals) were displaced from Shibar district in January 2020. A smaller group of 49 IDPs was displaced from Sayghan district in February 2020. All IDPs found refuge in Kabul province (Kabul district).¹¹³⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 730 persons displaced to Bamyan province, all coming from Jalrez district in Wardak province and finding refuge in Bamyan district in August 2019.¹¹³⁶ Surging insecurity and intensifying conflict between armed opposition groups and public uprising forces over control of the strategic area connecting Bamyan and Kabul province were reported to have displaced hundreds of people from their villages in the Maydan Valley (Jalrez district) of Wardak province. The IDPs found refuge in Bamyan province. When the situation in some villages in Jalrez improved, several displaced families were reported to have returned home or moved further on towards Kabul.¹¹³⁷ According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Bamyan province resided in Bamyan district, followed by

¹¹²⁶ Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (24): Disputed Recount, Threats Not to Accept Results, and Some Interesting New Data, AAN, 21 November 2019, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 98

¹¹²⁷ RFE/RL, Five Takeaways from Afghanistan's Presidential Election, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

¹¹²⁸ Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, [url](#)

¹¹²⁹ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 62

¹¹³⁰ Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, [url](#); Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹¹³¹ Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, [url](#)

¹¹³² An international source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 26

¹¹³³ AFP, Polls Close in Afghanistan Amid Reports of Irregularities, Sporadic Attacks, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

¹¹³⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Bamyan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹¹³⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

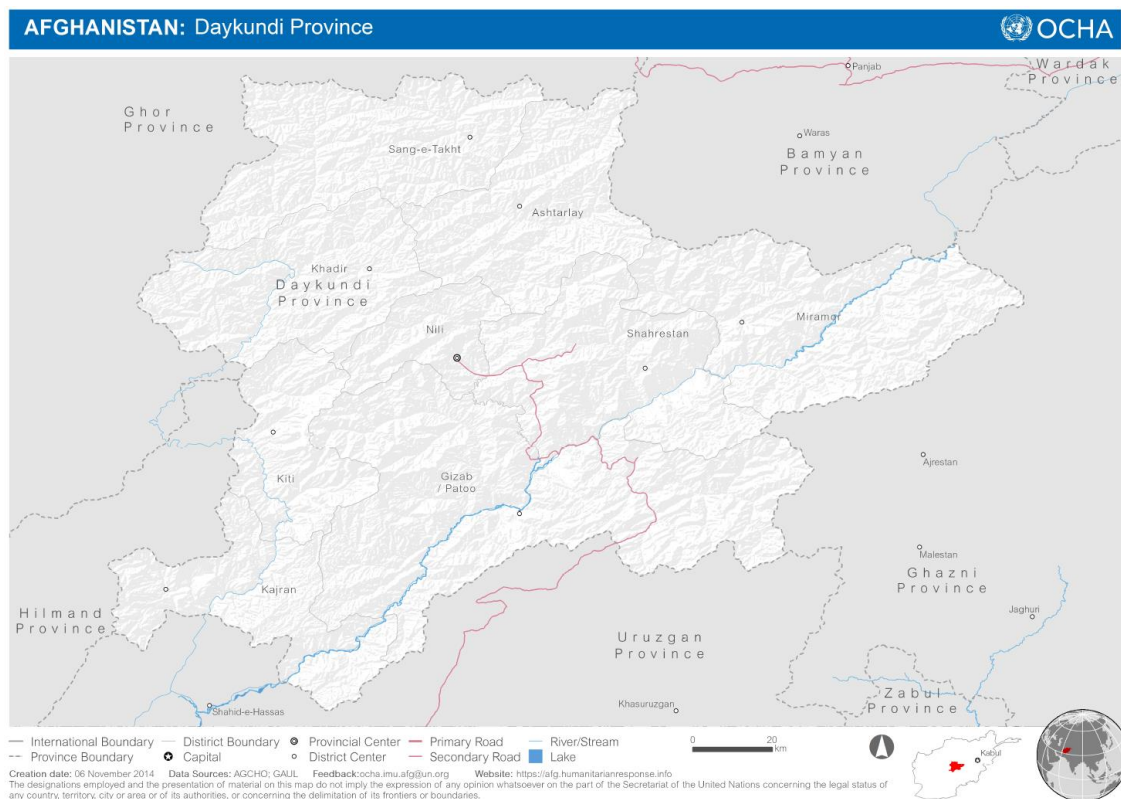
¹¹³⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹¹³⁷ ERM, AC401-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Bamyan City, August 2019, [url](#), p. 1

Kahmard district.¹¹³⁸ According to UNHCR, Bamyan is one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who originate there but choose to live somewhere else once they return.¹¹³⁹

2.7 Daykundi

2.7.1 General description of the province



Map 7: Afghanistan – Daykundi province, source: UNOCHA¹¹⁴⁰

Daykundi province is located in the central highlands region and has borders with the provinces of Ghor to the north and west, Bamyan to the north-east, Ghazni to the south-east, Uruzgan to the south and Helmand to the south-west.¹¹⁴¹ Daykundi province is divided into the following administrative: Ashtarlay, Nili, Kajran, Khadir, Kiti, Miramor, Sang-e Takht, Shahrestan, Gizab/Patoo and Nawmesh. The provincial capital is Nili.¹¹⁴²

According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Daykundi was once a district of Uruzgan province and was given the status of a separate province in 2003.¹¹⁴³ According to the Dutch embassy in Kabul, Daykundi originated from the province of Uruzgan in March 2004.¹¹⁴⁴

¹¹³⁸ IOM, Afghanistan - Bamyan Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 6; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) I June 2019 I Province: Bamyan, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

¹¹³⁹ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report - Final Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹¹⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Daykundi Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹¹⁴¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Daykundi Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹¹⁴² Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Daykundi, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 34

¹¹⁴³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Mineral Resources of Daikundi Province, 1 February 2014, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁴ Netherlands, Embassy in Kabul (The), Context Analysis - URUZGAN Province, August 2006, [url](#), p. 3

The administrative location of Gizab/Patoo district has been a source of contestation. The district changed hands between Daykundi province and the southern province of Uruzgan in the past and was disputed whether to be split in two or not.¹¹⁴⁵ According to AAN analyst Martine van Bijlert, in 2011, Gizab was formally still part of Daykundi province, despite the fact that in 2006 it was temporarily placed under the authority of the province of Uruzgan.¹¹⁴⁶ Several sources reported on the establishment of Patoo district in June 2018, formerly part of Gizab district in Uruzgan but now constituting a separate district belonging to Daykundi.¹¹⁴⁷ UNODC's Opium Survey from 2018 mentioned Gizab as 'formerly part of Daykundi [province], but under the administration of the governor of Uruzgan province'. In this survey, Gizab is listed as part of Daykundi until 2013, from on the year 2014 the district is listed as part of Uruzgan.¹¹⁴⁸ In the 2018 official list of districts by the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, Gizab district is mentioned as belonging to Uruzgan province according to the local authorities, and belonging to Daykundi province according to the Central Statistics Organisation (CSO).¹¹⁴⁹

In March 2016, the Hazara-dominated district of Nawmesh was 'split from the Pashtun-majority Baghran district in northern Helmand province' by presidential order. In June 2017, its administration was transferred to Daykundi province. Nawmesh was considered a 'temporary district'. According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig, '“temporary” districts [...] have been approved after entry into force of the 2004 constitution by the president due to security or other considerations, but have not yet been approved by parliament.'¹¹⁵⁰ UNAMA as well as AAN and several media sources mentioned Nawmesh district as part of Daykundi province in 2019.¹¹⁵¹

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Daykundi province has a population of 516 504.¹¹⁵² As Daykundi is part of the Hazarajat region¹¹⁵³, the main ethnic group in the province is Hazara. Other groups present include a minority of Pashtun, Baloch, and Sayed/Sadat.¹¹⁵⁴ Gizab/Patoo is a mixed Pashtun-Hazara district.¹¹⁵⁵

Daykundi is described as having a 'difficult geography'.¹¹⁵⁶ Most of the province's territory is mountainous, with heavy snowfall in winter often blocking roads for months.¹¹⁵⁷ For example in March 2019, Daykundi residents interviewed by Pajhwok Afghan News stated the roads connecting Patoo/Gizab district to the provincial capital Nili had been closed since long.¹¹⁵⁸ 'Bad' road conditions

¹¹⁴⁵ Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The Outstanding Role of Women, AAN, 27 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁶ Van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Gizab; the Fight Everyone Chose to Ignore, AAN, 31 October 2011, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi: 80pc of Pato Residents without Tazkira, 6 May 2018, [url](#); Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The Outstanding Role of Women, AAN, 27 January 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Not Allowing Us to Buy Food: Daikundi Residents, 30 March 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁴⁸ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 6, 62, 64, 68

¹¹⁴⁹ Afghanistan, IEC, Independent Directorate of Local Governance, Distribution of Seats to Districts, 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹⁵⁰ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good News and Bad News About District Numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁵¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi Blast: 7 People Killed, 4 Injured, 10 May 2019, [url](#); Reporterly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](#); Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangan Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 49

¹¹⁵² Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹⁵³ ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan: Informationen zur Volksgruppe der Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed [Query response on Afghanistan: Information on the ethnic group of the Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed)], 25 October 2017, [url](#); Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁴ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Dai Kundi Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁵ Van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Gizab; the Fight Everyone Chose to Ignore, AAN, 31 October 2011, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁶ Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangan Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Daykundi Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#); DW, Avalanches Kill 21 People in Afghanistan, Death Toll Expected to Rise, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁵⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Not Allowing Us to Buy Food: Daikundi Residents, 30 March 2019, [url](#)

and a lack of infrastructure were reported in Daykundi province.¹¹⁵⁹ According to Daykundi residents cited by Tolonews in April 2018, 'there is only one asphalted road in the province.' According to Daykundi's former governor cited in the same article, Daykundi has an airport, which is 'not standard' as only small planes can land.¹¹⁶⁰

In February 2019, the UN Secretary General reported that a combination of drought, ongoing conflict and low financial remittances had resulted in an atypically high demand for food and livelihood assistance in Daykundi province.¹¹⁶¹ According to UNODC's Opium Survey from 2018, Daykundi was not among Afghanistan's 10 main opium-poppy cultivating provinces in 2018; in fact cultivation amounted to less than 1 000 hectares. Compared to 2017, opium-poppy cultivation decreased by 50 % in 2018, positioning Daykundi among the provinces with a 'strong decrease'.¹¹⁶² UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52 % reduction in opium-poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region and the central highlands (including Daykundi province).¹¹⁶³ According to UNODC, 100 % of opium-poppy taxes in Daykundi province is collected by anti-government groups.¹¹⁶⁴

2.7.2 Conflict background and actors in Daykundi

Certain regions in Afghanistan, like Panjsher province and the area of the central highlands (including Daykundi province), have been described as relatively safe and less affected by conflict-driven violence.¹¹⁶⁵ According to an Afghan military expert cited by Tolonews, the relative stability of Daykundi as well as Bamyan and Panjsher provinces, is related to the social cohesion among its inhabitants, as most of them belong to the same ethnic or tribal group.¹¹⁶⁶

Mid-July 2019, an increase in Taliban attacks causing a deterioration of the security situation in some of Daykundi's districts was reported.¹¹⁶⁷ The situation in the districts of Gizab/Patoo, Ashtarlay and Khadir has been indicated as volatile.¹¹⁶⁸ Kajran and Nawmesh districts are equally reported among the province's most insecure areas.¹¹⁶⁹ In September 2019, UNOCHA reported on a 'tense' situation in the districts of Kajran and Patoo due to activities of non-state armed groups.¹¹⁷⁰ According to an international organisation Landinfo spoke with in October 2019, the Taliban were present in the southern areas of Daykundi.¹¹⁷¹

Several sources related the security situation in the aforementioned districts to their sharing borders with insecure areas in neighbouring provinces such as Helmand, Uruzgan, Ghor and Ghazni.¹¹⁷² For

¹¹⁵⁹ Afghanistan FSC, Daykundi Province Fact Findings (Qualitative Assessment) Report, 18 April 2018, [url](#), p. 3

¹¹⁶⁰ Tolonews, Daikundi Secure but Lacks Development: Residents, 6 April 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁶¹ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace & Security, A/73/777-S/2019/193, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 13

¹¹⁶² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 10, 11, 17, 19

¹¹⁶³ Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018: Challenges to Sustainable Development, Peace and Security, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 64

¹¹⁶⁵ DW, Afghanistan: 'A Latent Instability Dominates the Picture', 14 March 2017, [url](#); Tolonews, Daikundi Secure but Lacks Development: Residents, 6 April 2018, [url](#); Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The Outstanding Role of Women, AAN, 27 January 2019, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Spring Offensive and Flooding Since the Afghan New Year, 7 April 2019, [url](#); An international organisation Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 13; Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 51

¹¹⁶⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2017 Casualties: Nearly 25,000 People Killed, Wounded in Afghanistan, 14 January 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁷ Reportedly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁸ ERM, AC301-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Nili District of Daykundi Province, 23 June 2019, [url](#), p. 1; AP, 3 Policemen Die in Attacks on Afghan Police Chief, Governor, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁶⁹ Reportedly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (9 - 15 September 2019), 15 September, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹⁷¹ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 26

¹¹⁷² Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi Residents Concerned About Daesh in Neighborhood, 3 June 2018, [url](#); Reportedly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

example, Kajran district is described as a ‘corridor’ for the Taliban and part of a ‘strategic route’ through Helmand and Spin Boldak in Kandahar province.¹¹⁷³ According to provincial government officials, the increasing insecurity in some of Daykundi’s districts is partly attributed to an insufficient coordination among security forces and local departments¹¹⁷⁴ and to a lack of military equipment, often exploited by militant groups.¹¹⁷⁵ As stated by AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, the creation of Patoo district affected the security situation in the region, as it sowed local discord.¹¹⁷⁶ According to a provincial police spokesperson, the establishment of Patoo as a new district resulted in local Taliban commanders being forced to leave the area. Retreating to neighbouring Uruzgan province, these commanders affiliated with Taliban groups there to attack the southern region of Daykundi province.¹¹⁷⁷ Daykundi residents cited by Pajhwok Afghan News related the instability in the province to a competition among political parties, often connected to local armed groups. Their rivalries fuelling tension, distrust and division in the area.¹¹⁷⁸

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated Gizab/Patoo district as ‘contested’. However, a USDOD assessment of July 2019, reported by LWJ in the same map, designated this district as ‘government-controlled’. Kajran district is listed as ‘unconfirmable’ in this map, with LWJ specifying that it has not been able to confirm the Taliban’s claim of controlling all areas except the district centre, nor USDOD’s assessment that the district is ‘government-controlled’. Daykundi’s remaining districts were categorised as ‘government-controlled’ or ‘undetermined’ in this assessment.¹¹⁷⁹

Media sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in Kajran¹¹⁸⁰ and Patoo¹¹⁸¹ districts. In March 2019, residents of Patoo district declared to Pajhwok Afghan News that their village bazaar was under Taliban control and that militants prevented them from buying food.¹¹⁸² In August 2019, civilian protests were reported against increasing violence and Taliban attacks in Kajran and Patoo districts.¹¹⁸³ Several prominent Taliban figures were reported to have been killed in Kajran district.¹¹⁸⁴ In July 2019, a well-known Taliban commander called Mullah Noor was killed, together with more than 30 other militants.¹¹⁸⁵ In December 2019, the Taliban’s shadow chief for Nawzad district in Helmand province called Mullah Abdul Wasi was killed, together with several of his militants.¹¹⁸⁶

According to AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, the roads connecting Daykundi province to Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif, Kandahar and Herat are not secure.¹¹⁸⁷ For example, insecurity in the insurgency-affected Jalrez district of Wardak province has wider ramifications for the security situation in the Hazarajat region (including Daykundi province), ‘given the importance of passing through Jalrez and the risks that this transit entails’. Qaane referred to people being killed and/or kidnapped while travelling this route.¹¹⁸⁸ In December 2019, a pressure-plate IED detonated on the road connecting Daykundi to Ghazni

¹¹⁷³ Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 21 July 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁴ Reportedly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi Residents Concerned About Daesh in Neighborhood, 3 June 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁶ Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The Outstanding Role of Women, AAN, 27 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁷ Reportedly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Political Parties Seen As a Source of Insecurity in Daikundi, 14 April 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁷⁹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#) (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)

¹¹⁸⁰ Reportedly, 9 Security Forces Killed & Injured in Taliban Attack in Daikundi, 2 July 2019, [url](#); Reportedly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, [url](#); Xinhua, Taliban Shadow District Chiefs Killed in Afghan Provinces, 25 December 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁸¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Not Allowing Us to Buy Food: Daikundi Residents, 30 March 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁸² Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Not Allowing Us to Buy Food: Daikundi Residents, 30 March 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁸³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi Residents Rally against Mounting Instability, 3 August 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁴ See sources mentioned below.

¹¹⁸⁵ Reportedly, 9 Security Forces Killed & Injured in Taliban Attack in Daikundi, 2 July 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁶ Xinhua, Taliban Shadow District Chiefs Killed in Afghan Provinces, 25 December 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁷ Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The Outstanding Role of Women, AAN, 27 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁸⁸ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

province, impacting a civilian minibus and resulting in 10 civilians being killed and 9 injured. According to UNAMA, some sources claimed this road had been 'closed' by the Taliban.¹¹⁸⁹

No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP have been recorded in Daykundi province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED. One incident was recorded in June 2019, in which 10 Taliban and/or ISKP militants were killed and 5 were wounded during ground and air operations by Afghan and NATO forces in Kajran district.¹¹⁹⁰

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Daykundi is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps. Daykundi province is included in the Train, Advise and Assist Command - South (TAAC-S), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-S is led by US forces and has its headquarters in Kandahar province.¹¹⁹¹

2.7.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.7.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 70 civilian casualties (44 deaths and 26 injured) in Daykundi province. This represented an increase of 71 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were non-suicide IEDs, followed by ground engagements and aerial operations.¹¹⁹² Resolute Support¹¹⁹³ recorded between 0 and 50 civilian casualties in Daykundi province in the first half of 2020, with no variation between the first and second quarter of the year.¹¹⁹⁴

ACLED collected data on 40 violent events in Daykundi province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 29 were coded as 'battles', 8 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 3 as 'violence against civilians'. Kajran in the south-western region of the province stood out as the district where most incidents were reported, with 33 incidents recorded. Six incidents were reported in Nili district, where the provincial capital is located, and one incident was reported in Khadir district. In the rest of the province, no violent incidents were recorded.¹¹⁹⁵

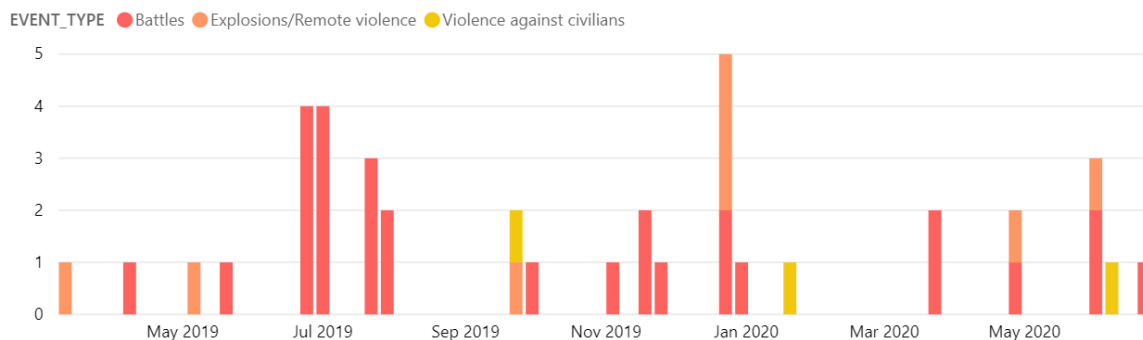


Figure 9. Daykundi - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data¹¹⁹⁶

¹¹⁸⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 42

¹¹⁹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹¹⁹¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹¹⁹² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹¹⁹³ Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.

¹¹⁹⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹¹⁹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Daykundi, [url](#)

ACLED coded around 73 % of the violent incidents in Daykundi province as ‘battles’, of which the majority were ‘armed clashes’. This category represented the most prevalent incident type in Kajran, Nili and Khadir districts. The majority of these armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military and police personal as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis* (the term *arbaki* is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias).¹¹⁹⁷ Examples of such incidents include attacks on military or police checkpoints/outposts and bases in Kajran district in June 2019¹¹⁹⁸, in July 2019¹¹⁹⁹, in November 2019¹²⁰⁰, in December 2019¹²⁰¹ and in March 2020¹²⁰²; in Nili district in July 2019¹²⁰³; in Nawmesh district in July 2019¹²⁰⁴ and in October 2019¹²⁰⁵; in Patoo district in August 2019¹²⁰⁶; and in Khadir (Kando) district in March 2020.¹²⁰⁷ No civilian casualties were reported in these incidents.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.¹²⁰⁸ For example in August 2019¹²⁰⁹ and December 2019¹²¹⁰, several Taliban militants were killed and wounded in ANDSF operations in Kajran district. In October 2019¹²¹¹ and November 2019¹²¹², several Taliban militants were killed during Special Forces’ raids in Gizab district.

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented 10 % of all reported security incidents in Daykundi.¹²¹³ For example in April 2020, the car of a provincial police chief hit a roadside bomb, causing several ANP casualties.¹²¹⁴ Some of the IED incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. This happened in May 2019, when a civilian vehicle hit a roadside bomb in Nawmesh district, killing seven civilians and wounding several others.¹²¹⁵

Air/drone strikes represented 10 % of all reported violent incidents in Daykundi. Three of these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces in Kajran district in December 2019, killing around 18 Taliban militants and wounding several others. One air/drone strike was reportedly carried out by NATO forces in April 2020, also in Kajran district, causing one civilian casualty.¹²¹⁶

¹¹⁹⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 25 Security Forces Killed, Injured in Daikundi Attack, 28 June 2019, [url](#); Xinhua, 8 Police Killed in Afghanistan's Central Province, 28 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-July 4, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁹⁹ Reporterly, 9 Security Forces Killed & Injured in Taliban Attack in Daikundi, 2 July 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁰ Al Jazeera, Blast Targets UN Vehicle in Afghanistan Killing One Foreigner, 24 November 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Suffer Casualties in Taliban Attack in Daikundi Province, 24 November 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 Security Personnel Killed, 5 Wounded in Daikundi Assault, 24 November 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁰¹ Xinhua, Taliban Shadow District Chiefs Killed in Afghan Provinces, 25 December 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁰² 1TV, Four Killed in Attack Police Checkpoints in Daikundi, 29 March 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁰³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Security Forces, 6 Rebels Killed in Fresh Offensives, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Killed, 7 Wounded in Fresh Wave of Violence, 7 October 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁶ RFE/RL, At Least 10 Afghan Police Killed in Taliban Attack on Security Checkpoint, 2 August 2019, [url](#); VoA, Afghan Official: Taliban Strike Police Checkpoint, Kill 10, 2 August 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Police Killed, 8 Injured in Daikundi Clash, 29 March 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁰⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹²⁰⁹ Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Inflict Heavy Casualties on Taliban in Daikundi and Kandahar, 3 August 2019, [url](#)

¹²¹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban Killed in Daikundi Operation, 27 December 2019, [url](#)

¹²¹¹ Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 38 Taliban Militants in Daykundi and Wardak, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹²¹² Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 27 Taliban and ISIS Militants in 6 Provinces, 19 November 2019, [url](#)

¹²¹³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹²¹⁴ AP, 3 Policemen Die in Attacks on Afghan Police Chief, Governor, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

¹²¹⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi Blast: 7 People Killed, 4 Injured, 10 May 2019, [url](#)

¹²¹⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

ACLED categorised 8 % of all reported violent incidents in Daykundi province as ‘violence against civilians’.¹²¹⁷ In October 2019, two polio-vaccinators were abducted by the Taliban in Nawmesh district. After the mediation of community elders, they were released three days later.¹²¹⁸ In January 2020, two trucks loaded with food were looted by Taliban militants in Kajran district. The drivers were abducted by the AGEs, but later released.¹²¹⁹ In June 2020, 53 civilians were reportedly taken hostage by the Taliban¹²²⁰, while on their way from Kajran district to Kiti district. Local elders were involved to negotiate the release.¹²²¹

Daykundi’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 represented the highest of all provinces, reaching over 55 %¹²²², with a high female turnout reported.¹²²³ However, across the whole province the 2019 voter turnout remained low compared to previous elections.¹²²⁴ In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 26-50 % of respondents in Daykundi province reported to have experienced fear while voting.¹²²⁵ Some voters in Daykundi and Bamyan provinces, who often travel back and forth to Kabul, were reported not to have participated in the elections out of fear of being stopped by the Taliban when passing through Jalrez district in Wardak province.¹²²⁶ According to AAN, election day in Daykundi province went relatively smoothly. A local journalist and an observer from the Afghanistan Civil Society Forum Organisation (ACSFO) indicated insecurity had influenced voting in Kajran, Patoo and Nawamesh districts.¹²²⁷ Without providing further details, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on election related attacks on polling day in Daykundi province.¹²²⁸ The polling centre in Buk-e Suf in Kajran district reportedly came under fire and was temporarily closed, no casualties were reported.¹²²⁹

2.7.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 2 390 persons displaced from Daykundi, from whom the majority (1 075) found refuge within the province itself (in Kajran and Nili districts). The remaining 1 315 IDPs from Daykundi sought shelter in the southern provinces of Kandahar (Spin Boldak district) and Helmand (Nahr-e Saraj district), in Kabul province (Kabul district) and in the western provinces of Herat (Injil district) and Ghor (Chag Charan district). The majority of IDPs in Daykundi province were displaced from Kajran district, with a peak of 874 individuals in July 2019 and a smaller number of 103 individuals in January 2020 and from Gizab/Patoo district with a peak of 983 individuals in December 2019 and a smaller number of 51 individuals in June 2019. Minor

¹²¹⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹²¹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 49

¹²¹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Rebels Accused of Looting Food-Laden Trucks, 24 January 2020, [url](#)

¹²²⁰ However, the Taliban denied their involvement in the hostage-taking. Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on: 20 June 2020, [url](#)

¹²²¹ 1TV, Taliban Abduct 53 Civilians in Daikundi, 20 June 2020, [url](#)

¹²²² Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (24): Disputed Recount, Threats Not to Accept Results, and Some Interesting New Data, AAN, 21 November 2019, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 98

¹²²³ RFE/RL, Five Takeaways from Afghanistan’s Presidential Election, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

¹²²⁴ Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, [url](#)

¹²²⁵ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 62

¹²²⁶ Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, [url](#); Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹²²⁷ Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, [url](#)

¹²²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 Killed, 123 Wounded in Election Day Attacks, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

¹²²⁹ Bjelica, J. and Ruttig, T. Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (11): A First Look at How E-Day Went, AAN, 28 September 2019, [url](#); Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, [url](#)

groups of IDPs were displaced from Ashtarlay district in October 2019 and from Nili, Sang-e Takht and Kiti districts in January and February 2020.¹²³⁰

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Daykundi province from other provinces was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020.¹²³¹

Fighting between Taliban militants and Afghan government troops in Gizab/Patoo district, as well as personal disputes between local commanders in Ashtarlay and Khadir districts were reported to have caused displacements to the area of Nili City in June 2019.¹²³² In July and August 2019, UNOCHA reported on continuing clashes over the strategic control of the Bazar Mushtarak area in Kajran district, causing the displacement of large numbers of people to various locations.¹²³³ Several villages in the area were reported to be inaccessible due to conflict and mine contamination.¹²³⁴

According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Daykundi province resided in Khadir district, followed by Nili and Miramor districts.¹²³⁵

¹²³⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹²³¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹²³² ERM, AC301-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Nili District of Daykundi Province, 23 June 2019, [url](#), p. 1

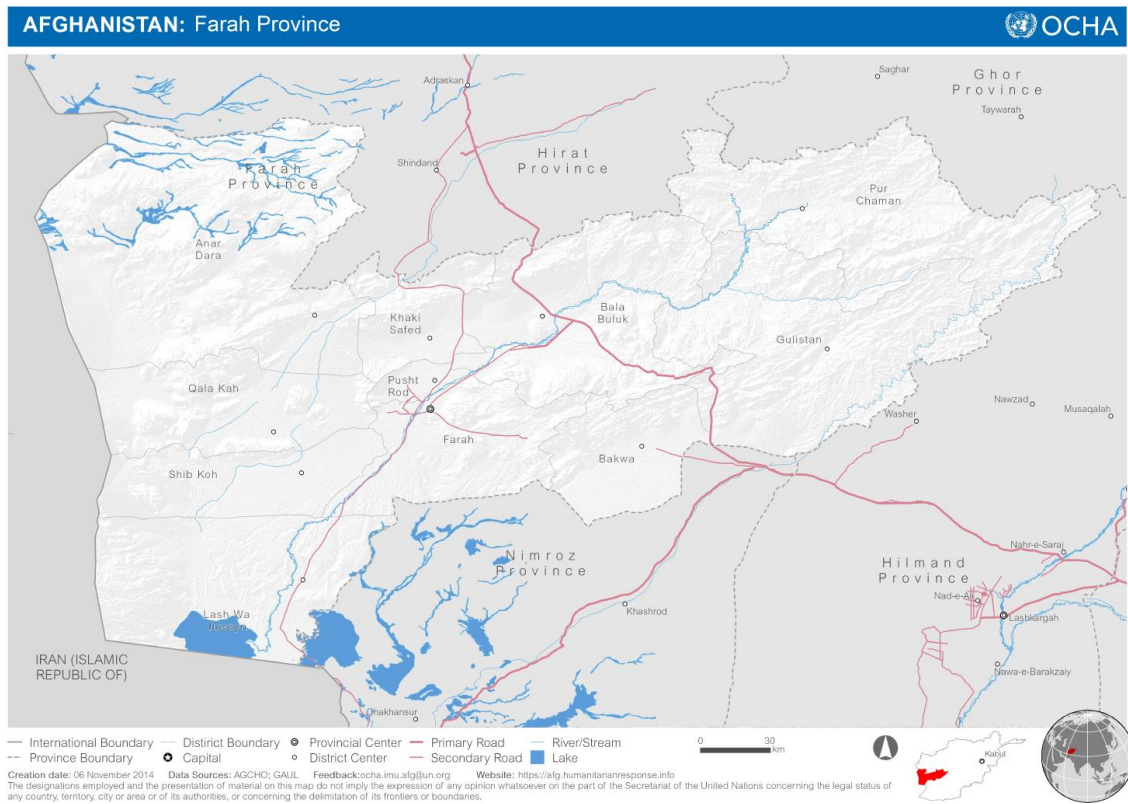
¹²³³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (29 July - 4 August 2019), 4 August 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹²³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (12 - 19 August 2019), 19 August 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹²³⁵ IOM, Afghanistan - Daykundi Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 6; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) I June 2019 I Province: Daykundi, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

2.8 Farah

2.8.1 General description of the province



Map 8: Afghanistan – Farah province, source: UNOCHA¹²³⁶

The province of Farah is located in the western part of Afghanistan and borders Herat to the north, Ghor to the north-east, Helmand to the south-east and Nimroz to the south, as well as Iran to the west.¹²³⁷ Farah province is divided into the following administrative units: Anar Dara, Bakwa, Bala Buluk, Farah, Gulistan, Khaki Safed, Lash-e Juwayn, Pur Chaman, Pushtud, Qala-i Kah (formerly Pusht-Koh) and Shib Koh. The provincial capital of Farah is Farah.¹²³⁸

Afghanistan NSIA estimated the population of Farah at 563 026 in 2020-21, with 128 047 of its residents living in the provincial capital.¹²³⁹ The majority of Farah's inhabitants are Pashtuns, with Tajik and smaller Hazara communities residing mainly in the countryside.¹²⁴⁰ Aylat, Mugal, Sadat, Bomodi, Aymaq, Barahawi and Baloch tribes live in Farah, according to Pajhwok Afghan News.¹²⁴¹

Part of the Ring Road leads through Farah, connecting the province with the regional centre of Herat in the north and the provinces of Nimroz and Helmand in the south and south-east, respectively.¹²⁴² Cross-border transport and trade with Iran is reportedly possible at Abu Nasr Farahi port.¹²⁴³ In September 2018, Tolonews reported security problems near the border crossing, as the route towards

¹²³⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Farah Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹²³⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Farah Province District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹²³⁸ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Farah, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., [url](#), pp. 5 and 43

¹²³⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., [url](#), pp. 5 and 43

¹²⁴⁰ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Farah Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁴¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Farah, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁴² Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁴³ Tolonews, Import Ban Affects Business In Farah Port, 21 September 2018, [url](#); IRNA, Afghanistan opens Farah border to Iranian goods, 4 November 2018, [url](#)

the border leads through militant-controlled areas.¹²⁴⁴ In April 2020, UNODC cited [drug] traffickers in Farah province confirming Taliban presence on the trafficking route between Farah and Nimroz, between Farah and Helmand and between Farah and Iran.¹²⁴⁵

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Farah is one of the main opium poppy-cultivating provinces in western Afghanistan.¹²⁴⁶ Regarding the size of poppy cultivation in hectares, Farah ranked 5th among all Afghan provinces in 2018, with a decrease of poppy acreage by 15 % compared to 2017¹²⁴⁷, after opium-poppy cultivation had increased by 41 % in 2017 compared to 2016.¹²⁴⁸ In 2020, UNODC indicated that ‘some traffickers believed that there might be nearer 20 or 30 [illicit opium manufacturing] laboratories in Farah’.¹²⁴⁹ According to AAN, in 2019, opium poppy cultivation in the western provinces including in Farah has decreased by 23 % compared to 2018.¹²⁵⁰

2.8.2 Conflict background and actors in Farah

According to AAN, the Taliban were never fully defeated after 2001 and kept a strong presence in the province – especially in Bala Buluk.¹²⁵¹ In February 2018, the Washington Post stated that approximately 60 % of Farah was controlled by insurgents, while the government controlled only the provincial capital and 10 district centres, some of which are allegedly too dangerous for district officials to visit.¹²⁵² In August 2019, Etilaatroz cited a former local commander indicating that the Taliban have a widespread presence in the remote areas of Farah province. The source also cited Shah Mahmood Naimi, member of provincial council of Farah province, stating [informal translation] ‘Taliban maintain entire control over Khak-e Safed, Shib Koh, Bakwa, Gulistan, Bala Buluk districts including all highways, and in the remaining districts, the government control is limited within 3 kilometres (from the capital of the districts).’ Naimi further stated ‘currently, the Taliban commute even during the day in the remote areas of the city.’ According to the source, Farah police confirms Taliban’s presence in three districts and government’s control over Highway One, and Taliban’s control over certain roads due to the lack of security forces.¹²⁵³ Another source indicated that Taliban operate in a number of districts of Farah province.¹²⁵⁴

In September 2019, Ariana News cited a local official in Farah province stating that ‘Taliban militants captured the center of Anar Darah district.’¹²⁵⁵ In October 2019, the same source cites the Afghan government indicated the presence of a Taliban prison in Pur Chaman¹²⁵⁶ and in September 2019 in Bakwa districts.¹²⁵⁷ On 7 January 2020, Afghanistan Times reported that the government claimed having cleared several villages from Taliban presence ‘in outskirt of Farah City and in Bala Blok and Qal-e-Kah districts’.¹²⁵⁸ While on 20 January 2020, Kabul Now news cited Abdul Sattar Hussaini, a Member of the Afghan Parliament, stating the Taliban established a Friday black market in Farah province where

¹²⁴⁴ Tolonews, Import Ban Affects Business In Farah Port, 21 September 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁴⁵ UNODC, OAPT update, ‘voices of Quchaqbar’, understand the opiate trafficking in Afghanistan from the perspective of drug traffickers, 22 April 2020, [url](#), p. 16

¹²⁴⁶ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 16

¹²⁴⁷ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹²⁴⁸ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017, November 2017, [url](#), p. 16

¹²⁴⁹ UNODC, AOTP update, voice of “Quchaqbar” understanding opiate trafficking in Afghanistan from the perspective of drug traffickers, 22 April 2020, [url](#), p. 25

¹²⁵⁰ AAN, New world drug report: opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁵¹ Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵² Washington Post (The), Outgunned in urban centers, Taliban wages fierce fight in remote western Afghanistan, 26 February 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵³ Etilaatroz, *بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه* [informal translation: ‘security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban’s mobility to heavy losses of the group’], 30 August 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁴ Ariana News, Afghan forces retreat from Anar Darah district of Farah province, 7 September 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁵ Ariana News, Afghan forces retreat from Anar Darah district of Farah province, 7 September 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁶ Ariana News, 7 civilians rescued from Taliban prison in Farah, 7 October 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁷ Ariana News, Afghan forces rescued 13 people from Taliban prison in Farah, 6 September 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁵⁸ Afghanistan Times, Several villages of Farah purged of Taliban presence, 7 January 2020, [url](#)

the group sold weapons seized from the ANDSF.¹²⁵⁹ According to information by LWJ collected and presented in a map, Gulistan, Bala Buluk, Saheb Koh, Anar Dara and Khak-e Safed districts of Farah province were under Taliban control, Qala-i Kah, Posht-e Rod, Bakwa, Pur Chaman districts as well as Farah City were contested, while Lash-e Juwayn district was under government control.¹²⁶⁰ In March 2020, Taliban reportedly closed the Farah-Herat Highway.¹²⁶¹ On 10 May 2020, local media reported that former chief police of Farah province joined the Taliban.¹²⁶² According to the UN Security Council report, as of 27 May 2020, the Taliban shadow governor for Farah was Mullah Mashar. The source also indicated that the former shadow governor for Farah province, Mullah Abdul Bari, was killed in an air strike in early August 2019.¹²⁶³ A local news also reported on the incident.¹²⁶⁴

In terms of government presence, the 207th Zafar Corps is in charge of the ANA operations in the province of Farah.¹²⁶⁵ As part of the RS Mission, Italian forces provide 'functionality-based' security assistance to ANA 207th Corps and ANP in Farah province.¹²⁶⁶

2.8.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.8.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 147 civilian casualties, including 87 killed and 60 injured in Farah province, which represents 47 % decrease compared to 2018. The leading causes of casualties were Non-Suicide IEDs, ground engagements and air strikes.¹²⁶⁷ According to SIGAR, RS (Resolute Support) recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Farah province during the first quarter of 2020¹²⁶⁸, and the mentioned source recorded the same number of civilian casualties (between 26 and 50) during the second quarter of 2020.¹²⁶⁹

According to ACLED data, between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 there were 441 security incidents recorded in Farah province, of whom 277 were coded as battles, 148 remote violence and 16 incidents of violence against civilians.

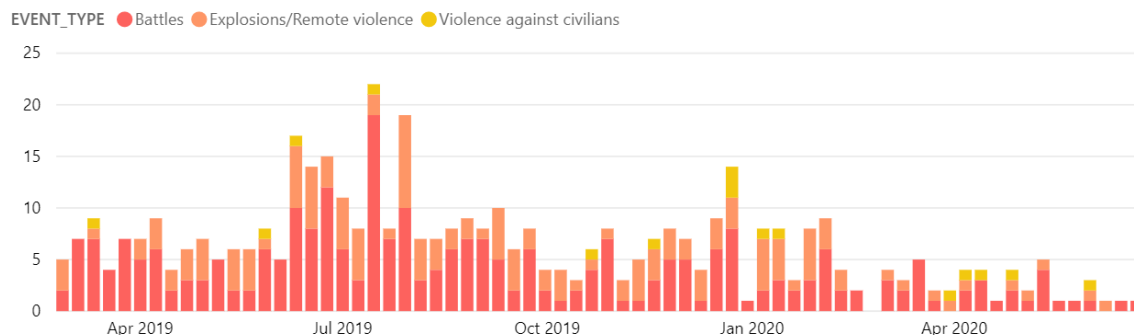


Figure 10. Farah - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data¹²⁷⁰

¹²⁵⁹ Kabul Now, Taliban retail weapons of Afghan forces in Farah, 20 January 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁰ LWJ, Several Districts Change Hands as Fighting Rages in Northern Afghanistan, 6 July 2020, [url](#), however the source does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated

¹²⁶¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Militants close Herat-Farah highway for traffic, 19 March 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁶² Pajhwok Afghan News, Former police chief joins Taliban in Farah, 10 May 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Interior minister reacts to as former chief of Farah joins Taliban, 10 May 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁶³ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 10 and 27

¹²⁶⁴ Ariana News, 103 militants including Taliban shadow governor killed in Farah, 4 August 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁶⁵ Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁶⁶ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹²⁶⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹²⁶⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

¹²⁶⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹²⁷⁰ Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Farah; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#)

In September 2019, Ariana News indicated that Farah province was one of the insecure provinces in the west of Afghanistan.¹²⁷¹ According to UNAMA, at the end of August and beginning of September 2019, the Taliban carried out extensive attacks against three provincial capitals including the capital of Farah province.¹²⁷² Several news sources reported that throughout 2019 and the first half of 2020, several armed confrontations between the Taliban and the ANDSF took place in Farah province¹²⁷³, including intense fighting in parts of Farah province in June 2020.¹²⁷⁴

In December 2019, Tolonews cited a member of the People's Peace Movement (PPM) who stated that 27 members of PPM have been abducted by the Taliban. The source quoted Dadullah Qani, member of the Farah provincial council, confirming the incident and stating that the group was kidnapped on Farah road while travelling from Herat to Nimroz province.¹²⁷⁵

Recent security incidents with impact on civilians in Farah province include: on 5 May 2019, between 30 and 45 civilian workers were killed, including children, in clashes and air strikes by foreign troops on drug production factories in Gulistan and Bakwa districts¹²⁷⁶; on 31 July 2019, between 24¹²⁷⁷ and 34 people were killed, and around 17 were wounded when a bomb struck a bus on the highway in the Ab Khorma area, which links the provincial capitals of Herat and Kandahar¹²⁷⁸; on 1 September 2019, six people were killed, including women and children when a roadside bomb exploded in Anardara district as family members of the local police chief were heading from the district centre to their home¹²⁷⁹; on 23 November 2019, ten civilians were killed, and five wounded in an air strike in the Gajki village of Pushtiroud district¹²⁸⁰; on 21 January 2020, Shia News Association indicated [informal translation] 'the Afghan Minister of Public Health stated that during the past year, over 50 health centres have been destroyed during the conflicts in Afghanistan and 112 others were closed down due to the conflict, in particular in Farah and Nangarhar provinces'¹²⁸¹; on 5 February 2020, two civilians were killed, and 10 others were wounded including women and children when a mortar hit Qala-i Kah and Shamalgah areas¹²⁸²; on 9 February 2020, five civilians, who were reportedly businessmen travelling from Farah City to Abu Nasar Farahi port were killed in an air strike¹²⁸³; on 12 May 2020, four children were killed by a mortar attack hitting a house in Bala Buluk district.¹²⁸⁴

2.8.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 17 830 persons displaced from Farah province, with 86 % displaced within the province itself (mainly in the provincial

¹²⁷¹ Ariana News, Afghan forces retreat from Anar Darah district of Farah province, 7 September 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁷² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 35

¹²⁷³ Ariana News, Taliban attacks border police checkpoint in Farah, 2 June 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan special forces storm Taliban leadership's compound in Farah province, 31 May 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Taliban attack pushed back in Farah: officials, 16 June 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan forces inflict casualties on Mullah Mushtaghfir, Mullah Muhajir militants in Farah, 7 August 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Heavy clashes ongoing in Farah: officials, 6 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Farah: police officer among 3 killed in insurgent attack, 20 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁴ Ariana News, Taliban attacks intensified in most parts of Afghanistan recently, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁵ Tolonews, 27 peace activists taken captive in Farah, 25 December 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, dozens of civilians, forces killed in Farah, 6 May 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, protection of civilians in armed conflicts, special report: airstrike on alleged drug-process facilities, 5 May 2019, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict, Quarterly report, 17 October 2019, [url](#), p. 5

¹²⁷⁸ Reuters, Afghanistan highway blast kills at least 34 on bus, injures 17, 31 July 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁷⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁸¹ Shia News Association, [unofficial translation] 'Health Ministry: in the past one year, 50 health centres have been destroyed, 21 January 2020', [url](#)

¹²⁸² 1TV News, mortar shelling kills two children, wounds 10 in Farah, 5 February 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁸³ Tolonews, Farah officials claim civilians were killed in airstrike, 9 February 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁴ Afghanistan Times, four children killed in Farah mortar attacks, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

capital district Farah and Qala-i Kah districts), 8 % were displaced into Kandahar, 3 % were displaced into Herat and the remaining 3 % into Nimroz province.¹²⁸⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 15 430 persons displaced to Farah province, with almost 100 % coming from within the province itself.¹²⁸⁶

During the months of May, June and July 2019, 1 362 individuals were displaced due to conflict from Bala Buluk, Khak-e-Safed, Gulistan, Pushtud, Shib Koh, Anardara and Qala-i Kah districts to the surrounding villages of Farah City.¹²⁸⁷ In August and September 2019, 1 287 people were displaced due to conflict from Bala Buluk, Khak-e Safed, Pur Chaman, Pushtud, Bakwa, Lash-e Juwayn, Shib Koh, Anardara districts and villages of Farah City.¹²⁸⁸

¹²⁸⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

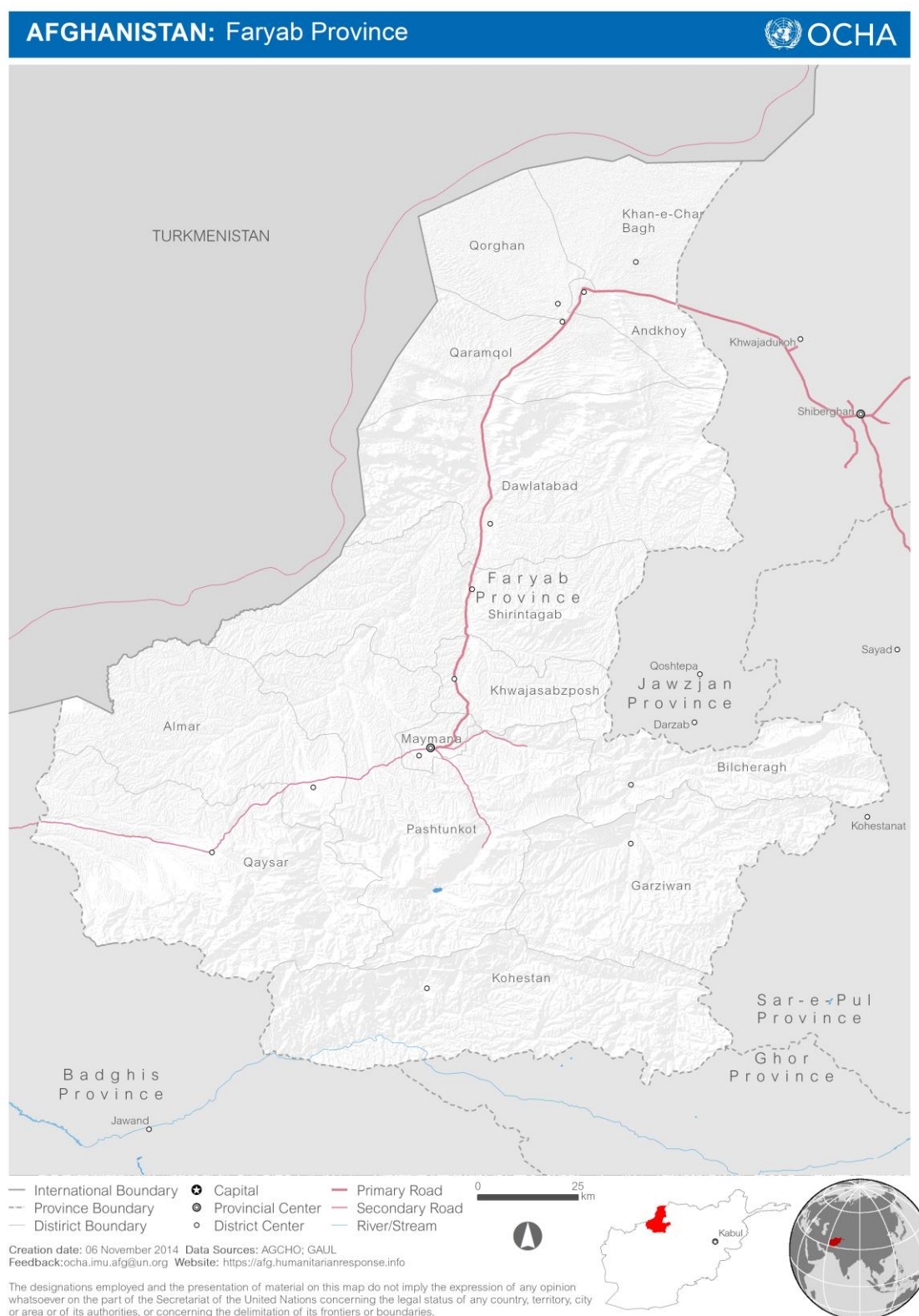
¹²⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁸⁷ UNOCHA, Farah Operational Coordination Team (OCT) meeting minutes, 25 July 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹²⁸⁸ UNOCHA, Farah Operational Coordination Team (OCT) meeting minutes, 3 October 2019, [url](#), p. 1

2.9 Faryab

2.9.1 General description of the province



Map 9: Afghanistan – Faryab province, source: UNOCHA¹²⁸⁹

¹²⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Faryab Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

Faryab province is located in the north-western part of Afghanistan and has borders with Jawzjan and Sar-e Pul provinces to the east, Ghor province to the south and Badghis province to the south-west and an international border with Turkmenistan to the west and north. Faryab province is divided into the following administrative units: Almar, Andkhoy, Bilcheragh, Dawlatabad, Garziwan, Khan-e Char Bagh, Khwajasabzposh, Kohestan, Maymana, Pashtunkot, Qaramqol, Qaysar, Qorghon, Shirintagab.¹²⁹⁰ The provincial capital is Maymana. According to UNODC, the district of Ghormach became part of Faryab in 2017.¹²⁹¹ In August 2018, the Peshawar-based daily newspaper, Frontier Post noted that Ghormach's administrative affairs would be shifted back to Badghis due to security reasons.¹²⁹² The administrative belonging of Ghormach seems to be disputed. Afghanistan Analysts Network reported in 2017 that the central government had already transferred Ghormach to Faryab in 2007, while the governor of Faryab did not consider Ghormach to be part of Faryab in 2010.¹²⁹³ In 2018, AAN stated that Ghormach had been 'temporarily transferred' to Faryab according to a list of Afghanistan's district numbers which was jointly published by the Central Statistics Organization and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG).¹²⁹⁴ The 2020/21 population estimation of the Afghan NSIA, as well as the publication of the 2019 presidential election results by the Independent Election Commission again listed Ghormach as part of Badghis.¹²⁹⁵

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1 109 223, 95 971 of whom live in the provincial capital, Maymana.¹²⁹⁶ The main ethnic groups in the province are Uzbeks. Other groups present include Tajiks/Aimaqs, Pashtuns, Hazara, Moghol and other smaller ethnicities.¹²⁹⁷

A part of the Ring Road leads through Faryab, connecting the province with neighbouring Jawzjan and the regional centre Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province.¹²⁹⁸ According to AAN, parts of the paved highway between Badghis and Faryab have been under Taliban control in the past¹²⁹⁹ and in March 2018, the Taliban were threatening parts of the Ring Road, as well as important provincial roads.¹³⁰⁰ According to UNOCHA, the road between Andkhoy district and provincial capital Maymana remained contested in January and February 2020. AGEs had control and were taxing commercial and logistic vehicles.¹³⁰¹ This impacted civilian movement as well.¹³⁰²

As of July 2020, scheduled air passenger services between Maymana and Kabul were provided.¹³⁰³

¹²⁹⁰ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Faryab, 2020, [url](#); NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 39

¹²⁹¹ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#); UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 15

¹²⁹² Frontier Post (The), Ghormach falls to Taliban as ANA troops move to Maimana, 28 August 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹³ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁴ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁵ NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 39, 41; Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Faryab, 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁶ NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 39

¹²⁹⁷ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile Faryab province, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁹⁸ Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁹⁹ Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁰ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, [url](#); Salam Watandar, Taliban collecting billions through illicit customs, religious taxes, 16 May 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁰² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (10 February – 16 February 2020), 19 February 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁰³ KamAir, Route Map – domestic flights, n.d., [url](#)

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Faryab was among the ten main opium poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018 – though it ranked within the lowest third of those ten provinces. Compared to 2017, the size of poppy-cultivating acreage in Faryab decreased by 64 % in 2018, even though UNODC counted Ghormach – a district with sizeable opium-poppy cultivation – as part of Faryab for the first time in 2018. UNODC linked the decrease mainly to that year's weather conditions, as Faryab was affected by a drought.¹³⁰⁴

2.9.2 Conflict background and actors in Faryab

According to AAN, '[...] Faryab is strategically important as it connects the western parts of the country with the north – it was through Faryab that the Taliban moved to capture Mazar-e Sharif in 1997 and 1998 and from where anti-Taliban forces came to re-capture the city in 2001.'¹³⁰⁵ In 2018, Faryab was described as 'one of the most contested provinces in the north-west'¹³⁰⁶ with 'an astonishingly widespread Taliban presence'.¹³⁰⁷

AAN links the Taliban's success in Faryab from 2007 onwards to 'local Jamiati-Jombesh rivalries, poppy-cultivation interests and radical propaganda by religious preachers, coupled with the absolute inconsistency of government outreach'¹³⁰⁸ as well as the exploitation of local land and water conflicts and the rearmament of local commanders.¹³⁰⁹ According to AAN, fighting broke out between local pro-government militias in early 2018, which further weakened the resistance against AGEs.¹³¹⁰

In March 2018, AAN described how the Taliban became increasingly successful in the province after drawing on local fighters – which is a change in strategy compared to the Taliban's approach before 2001. Since 2008, Faryab's Taliban shadow governors mostly have been Uzbeks and also a majority of the Taliban district officers are Uzbeks in districts with an Uzbek majority, along with a few Tajiks. Pashtuns serve on mid-level posts in the districts of Qaysar, Dawlatabad, and Shirintagab where Pashtuns form a considerable share of the population.¹³¹¹ However, AAN reported that the strategy of endorsement towards non-Pashtun ethnic groups among Faryab's Taliban limited the group's organisational capacity as some Pashtun Taliban commanders ignored instructions of Uzbek shadow governors. In order to avoid tensions, the then shadow governor allegedly deployed a strategy of individual smaller operations by each group in their own areas instead of joint operations with larger numbers of fighters.¹³¹²

General Abdul Rashid Dostum, Jombesh party leader and self-proclaimed sole representative of the Uzbek minority in Afghanistan, allegedly perceived the Taliban outreach to Uzbek communities as a threat. Subsequently, Dostum put considerable effort in combatting the Taliban influence on Uzbek communities in Faryab and led several counteroffensives of pro-government (Jombesh) militias together with the ANSF throughout 2015 and 2016. According to AAN, there were 'some initial successes, but no significant long-term results': Dostum was reportedly able to clear most parts of Qaysar, Dawlatabad, and Shirintagab (as well as Ghormach) of Taliban militants. Local government

¹³⁰⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 14-15, 17, 25

¹³⁰⁵ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁶ Adili A. A., Afghanistan Elections Conundrum (17): Voters disenfranchised in Faryab, AAN, 12 October 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁷ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁸ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, AAN, 3 July 2015, [url](#)

¹³⁰⁹ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹⁰ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹¹ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan's most notorious hotspots, AAN, 3 July 2015, [url](#); Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

¹³¹² Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

forces and pro-government militias have however not been able to hold most of the areas after Dostum moved out of Faryab.¹³¹³ According to analyst Deedee Derksen, Dostum's remobilising of local militias might have strengthened the Taliban in the long run, as large numbers of militiamen formerly affiliated to Dostum might have defected to the Taliban after their funding by Dostum dried up.¹³¹⁴

In November 2018, the Faryab governor claimed that at least 80 % of Faryab province was under Taliban control. Two districts were fully under Taliban control, while eight other districts were on the verge of collapse according to the civil society foundations network head.¹³¹⁵ According to the police, the Taliban controlled the main district bazaar in Qaramqol district and security personnel inside the district building were besieged in June 2019.¹³¹⁶ The Taliban retook control of Qaramqol district in November 2019.¹³¹⁷ In June 2019, Bilchiragh district was recaptured by the ANDSF after having been under Taliban control for over a year.¹³¹⁸ In July 2019, after a year, Afghan security forces managed to retake two strategic locations in the south-eastern outskirts of Maymana City.¹³¹⁹ With the exception of the district centre, all areas of Dawlatabad were said to be under Taliban control in August 2019.¹³²⁰ Much of the area in Almar district was reported to be under Taliban control in October 2019.¹³²¹ An Afghanistan analyst contacted by the Swedish Migrations Agency (Migrationsverket) in January 2020, considered Sar-e Pul and Faryab to be the most Taliban-controlled or influenced provinces in the northern region.¹³²² As of 2 July 2020, an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Bilcheragh, Kohestan, Pashtunkot, Qaramqol and Shirintagab districts as 'Taliban-controlled', Andkhoy and Khan-e Char Bagh districts as 'government-controlled' and the remaining districts in Faryab province as 'contested'.¹³²³

According to information at the disposal of the UN Security Council in 2019 and 2020, in Afghanistan Central Asian groups are under the direct operational and financial control of the Taliban. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan is said to have no more than 100 members and operates mainly in Faryab and Jowzjan provinces where it maintains links to splinter groups such as Islamic Jihad Group and Khatiba Imama al-Bukhari.¹³²⁴ Besides local Taliban fighters, a small Taliban-affiliated group of the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) was reportedly fighting in Faryab in 2018.¹³²⁵

According to information submitted to the UN Secretary General for the February 2020 report, ISKP had a covert presence in Faryab province, consisting of a group of up to 25 members, led by Qari Salahuddin, who was formerly with the Taliban.¹³²⁶ In May 2020, provincial officials expressed concern about ISKP affiliates, recruiting and looking for strengthening its position in Faryab province after the

¹³¹³ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

¹³¹⁴ War on the Rocks, In Afghanistan, Today's Pro-Government Militias Could Be Tomorrow's Insurgents, 11 December 2017, [url](#)

¹³¹⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban control 80pc of Faryab area, says governor, 28 November 2018, [url](#)

¹³¹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security personnel, Taliban suffer casualties in Faryab clashes, 30 June 2019, [url](#)

¹³¹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban overrun Qarma Qul district of Faryab, 23 November 2019, [url](#)

¹³¹⁸ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/990-S/2019/703, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 6; Tolonews, Afghan Forces Recapture Faryab's Bilcheragh District, 25 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces retake Faryab's Balcharagh district, 25 June 2019, [url](#)

¹³¹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan forces recapture 2 strategic areas in Maimana, 2 July 2019, [url](#)

¹³²⁰ Pajhwok Afghan news, Civilians among 16 suffer casualties in Faryab clash, 15 August 2019, [url](#)

¹³²¹ NYT, Afghans Demanded a Fair Election. They Could Be Waiting a While for Results, 13 October 2019, [url](#)

¹³²² Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 47

¹³²³ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

¹³²⁴ UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 18; UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 21

¹³²⁵ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan's major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#)

¹³²⁶ UNSG, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 4 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7

US-Taliban deal.¹³²⁷ However, no security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Faryab province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.¹³²⁸

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Faryab province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps.¹³²⁹ Faryab province is included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.¹³³⁰

2.9.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.9.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 665 civilian casualties (199 deaths and 466 injured) in Faryab. This represents an increase of 3 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by air strikes and explosive remnants of war.¹³³¹ Throughout 2019 UNAMA ranked Faryab among the five provinces in Afghanistan where civilians were most affected by the armed conflict.¹³³² In the first half of 2020, UNAMA ranked Faryab province fourth in terms of civilians most affected by the conflict, documenting 233 civilian casualties in the province.¹³³³ Resolute Support recorded between 102 and 150 civilian casualties in Faryab in the first half of 2020, reporting similar numbers of civilian casualties between the first and second quarter of 2020.¹³³⁴

ACLED collected data on 579 violent events in Faryab province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 422 of which were coded as battles, 135 as explosions/remote violence and 22 as violence against civilians.¹³³⁵ An international source interviewed by the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, Landinfo, during a fact-finding mission at the end of October 2019, counted Faryab among the six most violent provinces in Afghanistan in terms of number of security incidents.¹³³⁶ According to a representative of an international NGO met by the Swedish Migration Agency, Migrationsverket, in Kabul in January 2020, Faryab remained a very insecure province where the security situation had further deteriorated compared to before.¹³³⁷ While ACLED registered violent events in all of Faryab's districts, Qaysar and Pashtunkot stood out as districts where most incidents were reported, with more than 90 incidents

¹³²⁷ Afghanistan Times, Daesh may be regaining strength in Faryab, 9 May 2020, [url](#)

¹³²⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹³²⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 50

¹³³⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹³³¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹³³² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict: 1 January To 30 June 2019, Midyear Update, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 3; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict: 1 January To 30 September 2019, Quarterly Report 17 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹³³³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians In Armed Conflict. Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

¹³³⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹³³⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹³³⁶ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan. Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 12-13

¹³³⁷ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 45

reported in each district, as registered by ACLED, followed by Almar, Garziwan and Shirintagab districts, each with 50 or more violent events.¹³³⁸

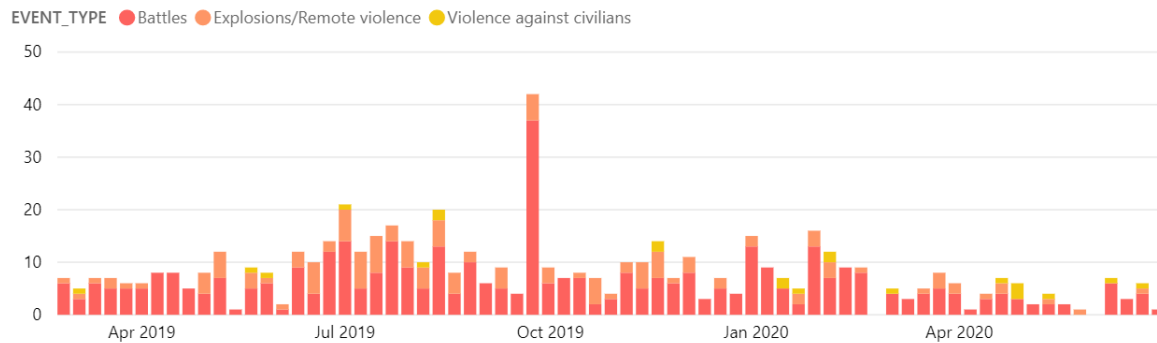


Figure 11. Faryab - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data¹³³⁹

ACLED coded 73 % of the violent incidents in Faryab province as ‘battles’, mainly ‘armed clashes’.¹³⁴⁰ The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military¹³⁴¹, police¹³⁴² or NDS personnel¹³⁴³ and members of pro-government militias¹³⁴⁴ or so-called Arbakis (the term ‘Arbaki’ is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias) or attacks on military or police facilities such as checkpoints¹³⁴⁵, police headquarters¹³⁴⁶ and bases¹³⁴⁷ and to a lesser extent on convoys and vehicles. Some of those incidents resulted in civilian casualties, as for example during Taliban ambushes on security forces in Qaysar district on 18 October 2019 and in Khwajasabzposh district on 1 September 2019.¹³⁴⁸ Three civilians were wounded and 17 shops were destroyed during a battle following a Taliban attack in Shirintagab district on 7 September 2019.¹³⁴⁹ On 7 January 2020, a shopkeeper and two civilians were injured when a Taliban fighter dressed in burqa fired at NDS agents sitting in shop in Dawlatabad district.¹³⁵⁰ A woman was killed in a clash following a Taliban attack on a security outpost in Dawlatabad district on 24 March 2020.¹³⁵¹ Civilians were killed and wounded in Taliban attacks on the centre of Shirintagab district in April 2020. In that same month, two children were killed in a clash following a Taliban attack on a security outpost in Kohestan district.¹³⁵² On 27 June 2020, mortar shells fired by security forces in

¹³³⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹³³⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Faryab, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹³⁴¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁴² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁴³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 security forces killed and wounded in Faryab assault, 1 March 2019, [url](#)

NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 15-21, 22 March 2019, [url](#); NYT, Taliban Capture About 150 Afghan Soldiers After Chase Into Turkmenistan, 17 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁴⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 killed, 24 wounded in Faryab firefight, 7 September 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Burqa-clad insurgent kills 3 NDS personnel in Faryab, 7 January 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁵¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁵² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

response to a Taliban attack on a military base in Qorghon district hit a house, killing a child and wounding four other civilians.¹³⁵³

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes.¹³⁵⁴ Some of these operations were backed by air strikes.¹³⁵⁵ Most of the security operations were carried out in March, July and August 2019, while fewer were registered by ACLED in the first half of 2020.¹³⁵⁶

There were reports of groups of Taliban fighters attacking the centre of Dawlatabad district on 25 May 2019¹³⁵⁷, of Kohestan district on 30 May 2019¹³⁵⁸, of Shirintagab district on 14 March and 17 August 2019¹³⁵⁹, of Bilcheragh district on 4 August 2019¹³⁶⁰ and of Almar and Qaramqol districts in April 2020¹³⁶¹, sometimes resulting into hour-long clashes. UNOCHA reported that continued clashes between AGEs and the ANDSF in various districts of Faryab in January and February 2020 caused civilian casualties.¹³⁶²

During the reporting period there were reports of the Taliban capturing villages and government forces recapturing areas in Pashtunkot district.¹³⁶³ The Taliban temporarily captured Qorghon district at the end of August 2019.¹³⁶⁴ Clashes in the weeks that followed caused a few hundred people to flee to Andkhoy district.¹³⁶⁵ Fighting in Almar district in August 2019 resulted in the loss of civilian property and livelihoods.¹³⁶⁶ The Taliban reportedly captured villages in Khwajasabzposh in September 2019.¹³⁶⁷ In March 2020, the Taliban tried to overrun Almar district.¹³⁶⁸

Air/drone strikes represented 13 % of all reported violent incidents in Faryab between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020¹³⁶⁹, while incidents of shelling/artillery/missile attack represented 7 %.¹³⁷⁰ Nearly half of those types of incidents in Faryab between 1 March 2019 and 20 June 2020 occurred in

¹³⁵³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020 (updated 2 July 2020), [url](#)

¹³⁵⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹³⁵⁵ Khaama Press, 28 Taliban militants killed in past 48 hours in Faryab: 209th Shaheen Corps, 18 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama press, Key Taliban commanders among 31 killed in Faryab operations: 209th Shaheen Corps, 2 July 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Nearly 500 Taliban militants killed in Faryab in past one month: 209th Shaheen Corps, 20 July 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹³⁵⁷ NYT Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 security personnel killed in Faryab attack, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁵⁹ NYT Afghan War Casualty Report: March 8-14, 15 March 2019, [url](#); NYT Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁰ NYT Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶¹ NYT Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 January – 26 January 2020), 29 January 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January – 2 February 2020), 5 February 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (10 February – 16 February 2020), 19 February 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (17 February – 23 February 2020), 26 February 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁶³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces recapture strategic area of Faryab, 11 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban driven from 4 strategic Faryab villages, 8 July 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab's Qarghan district falls to Taliban: Officials, 28 August 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Forces re-take control of Faryab's Qarghan district, 30 August 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 September 2019), 25 September 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 - 11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁸ NYT, Taliban Attack Afghanistan Amid Growing Coronavirus Threat, 28 March 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁶⁹ These do not include air strikes or shellings carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under 'battles'. For more information on ACLED's methodology, please consult the introduction.

¹³⁷⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

Pashtunkot, Bilchiragh and Qaysar districts. Most air strikes were carried out by Afghan forces, while some were attributed to NATO forces. While air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs¹³⁷¹, some also caused civilian casualties. Air strikes in response to a Taliban attack in Garziwan district on 1 September killed at least 12 civilians.¹³⁷² A drone strike in Shorcha village of Pashtunkot district on 4 August 2019 killed two brothers and wounded another one.¹³⁷³ Incidents of shelling/artillery/missile attack were attributed to both the Taliban and Afghan military forces and at times caused civilian casualties as for example in Almar district in May 2019.¹³⁷⁴ Two mortar shells fired by the Taliban landed in a local bazaar in Khwajasabzposh on 5 July 2019, killing at least four civilians and wounding at least 33 others.¹³⁷⁵ A child was killed and four other civilians were wounded as a result of a mortar shell exploding while children were playing in a house in Pashtunkot on 6 August 2019¹³⁷⁶ and a mortar hit a civilian house in Bilcheragh district on 29 September 2019 and the house of an imam in Qaysar district in February 2020, killing and wounding civilians.¹³⁷⁷ At least 11 civilians were killed or wounded as a result of Taliban rocket and mortar attacks on a village in Qaysar district in April 2020.¹³⁷⁸

AGEs also used roadside bombs¹³⁷⁹ or IEDs, including pressure-plate IEDs¹³⁸⁰, or magnetic bombs to target security forces, at times also causing casualties among civilians.¹³⁸¹ This happened on 10 May 2019 in Dawlatabad district when children herding their cattle were killed and wounded when they struck an IED¹³⁸² or on 27 October 2019 in Pashtunkot district, when a boy was killed together with four other boys, after stepping on a pressure-plate IED.¹³⁸³ Targeting army personnel, the Taliban had planted the device on a public road near an ANA checkpoint.¹³⁸⁴ Another child was killed when a roadside bomb exploded in Almar district in April 2020¹³⁸⁵ and seven children were injured when their donkey stepped on a pressure-plate IED in Garziwan district on 8 June 2020.¹³⁸⁶

Twenty-two incidents of violence against civilians were registered by ACLED, representing 3 % of all violent events in Faryab province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 and attributed to both the Taliban and Afghan security forces.¹³⁸⁷ These included the killing of the head of an appeal court¹³⁸⁸, the

¹³⁷¹ Khaama Press, Airstrike by Afghan Air Force kills 30 Taliban militants in Faryab province, 17 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's district chief among 8 killed in Faryab, 12 September 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁷² NYT, To Start Afghan Withdrawal, U.S. Would Pull 5,400 Troops in 135 Days, 2 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians among over 50 killed in Faryab airstrikes, 1 September 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁷³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁴ Tolonews, Airstrikes Kill 10 Militants In Faryab, 21 May 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 killed, score injured in Faryab mortar attack, 5 July 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 civilians killed in Faryab mortar shelling, 30 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Children among 5 killed in Faryab incidents, 7 February 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁸ Khaama Press, Children, elder man among 14 killed, wounded in latest Taliban attacks in Faryab, 26 April 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Separate Taliban attacks cause 28 civilian casualties, 26 April 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁷⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 43

¹³⁸¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸² Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 children killed, 5 injured in Faryab blast, 10 May 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁸³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 children killed, 1 wounded in Faryab landmine blast, 27 October 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 43

¹³⁸⁵ Khaama Press, Children, elder man among 14 killed, wounded in latest Taliban attacks in Faryab, 26 April 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁸⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 9-10

¹³⁸⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹³⁸⁸ Afghan Islamic Press (@aip_news), [Twitter], posted on 16 January 2020, [url](#)

kidnapping of four NGO health workers by an armed group during a vaccine survey in May 2019¹³⁸⁹, the rape of two girls by unidentified gunmen in an area under Taliban control in Qaramqol district in May 2019¹³⁹⁰, the killing of women accused of committing immoral acts¹³⁹¹, the killing of a tribal elder¹³⁹², the killing of an off-duty soldier¹³⁹³, the abduction and killing of three civilians, including a former garrison commander¹³⁹⁴, the killing of a family in Andkhoy district¹³⁹⁵ and the public hanging of two men having shaved their beards by the Taliban¹³⁹⁶, the killing of two scholars by unknown gunman in Maymana City¹³⁹⁷ and the killing of civilians by the Afghan security forces, as reported by the Taliban.¹³⁹⁸ The Taliban kidnapped a local journalist on 11 October 2019 in Faryab, releasing him the day after.¹³⁹⁹ In an attack on Kohi village in Qaysar district on 28 April 2019, the Taliban killed six civilians and wounded nine others. Local officials claimed that the villagers' support for the government was the reason for the attack.¹⁴⁰⁰

Illustrating a consistent pattern of the use of civilian locations by AGEs when carrying out their attacks in Afghanistan, which exposes civilians to risks of attack by pro-government forces, as noted by UNAMA, was an incident on 18 November 2019 in the Khwaja Naamosi area of Pashtunkot district.¹⁴⁰¹ An American air strike targeted a house used as a shelter by the Taliban. Three civilians were killed as a result.¹⁴⁰²

There were reports from the northern region, which includes Faryab province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019.¹⁴⁰³ Ahead of the presidential election in September 2019, AGEs closed the road between Maymana City and the districts in Faryab.¹⁴⁰⁴ Clashes between Afghan security forces and the Taliban were reported on election day, 28 September 2019, in six of Faryab's districts¹⁴⁰⁵, including Bilcheragh¹⁴⁰⁶ and Qaysar.¹⁴⁰⁷

In the reporting period security incidents occurred along the highway or roads, such as a Taliban attack on Maymana - Jawzjan Highway in Qaramqol district in June 2019.¹⁴⁰⁸ In July 2019 a clearance operation was carried out along the highway in Bilcheragh and Garziwan districts.¹⁴⁰⁹ Passing a zone

¹³⁸⁹ Insecurity Insight, Attacks on health care in Afghanistan, 21 May 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Gunmen rape 2 sisters in Faryab, family seeks justice, 19 May 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report, 1 January - 30 June 2019, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 3; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 19; Pajhwok Afghan News, Woman shot dead in Faryab over alleged elopement, 22 November 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁹² Reportedly, Taliban Hang Tribal Elder For Not Paying 300 AFN, 18 August 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Family Of Well-Known Writer Among Seven Killed In Afghan Violence, 20 June 2020, [url](#); MIE, Tribal Elder Shot Dead by Taliban in Faryab, 20 June 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture, kill off-duty soldier in Faryab, 7 February 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁵ Salam Watandar, 'Taliban kill six members of a family in Faryab', 19 January 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 of a family shot dead in Faryab; Taliban deny involvement, 19 January 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁶ Afghanistan Times, Taliban hang two men for shaving beards in Faryab, 27 June 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection of Civilians In Armed Conflict. Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹³⁹⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁸ Voice of Jihad, Enemy firing martyr child in Faryab, 8 February 2020, [url](#); Voice of Jihad, Enemy martyrs villager, abducts 3 others in Faryab, 23 January 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁹⁹ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/582-S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁴⁰⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 51

¹⁴⁰² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 - 29 September 2019), 2 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁵ RFE/RL, Five Takeaways From Afghanistan's Presidential Election, 28 September 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Afghan presidential vote held in relative calm, but turnout low, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁷ NYT, Signs of Ballot-Box Stuffing Add Tension to Afghan Vote Count, 3 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security personnel, Taliban suffer casualties in Faryab clashes, 30 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰⁹ Khaama Press, At least 50 militants killed, wounded in Special Forces raid in Faryab: Special Ops Corps, 30 July 2019, [url](#)

of fighting on the Maymana - Almar road on 9 October 2019 a civilian car was hit by bullets. The driver and a girl were killed, three women were injured.¹⁴¹⁰

Within the framework of its attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) did not register such attacks in Faryab province in 2019.¹⁴¹¹ Faryab was one out of six provinces where UNAMA documented the abduction of healthcare workers between 11 March and 23 May 2020.¹⁴¹²

As a result of clashes between the Taliban and security forces, residents of provincial capital Maymana had no electricity for at least a week at the end of September 2019. This also impacted access to water and food.¹⁴¹³ In October 2019, when clashes were reported in several of Faryab's districts, a resident of Pashtunkot district spoke to Tolonews about the fighting causing problems in the clinics and schools being closed, adding that there was no electricity or proper drinking water in the district.¹⁴¹⁴

2.9.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA reported regularly how continued clashes between AGEs and the ANDSF in Faryab caused displacement in the reporting period.¹⁴¹⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 38 222 persons who were displaced due to conflict from Faryab province, 71 % of whom were displaced within the province itself. Most IDPs were registered from Pashtunkot, Khwajasabzposh and Garziwan districts. Nearly half of all IDPs from Pashtunkot were displaced in June 2019. All IDPs from Pashtunkot left the district, the large majority seeking refuge in provincial capital Maymana, while others fled to Herat, Shiberghan or Sar-e Pul. More than half of the IDPs from Khwajasabzposh were displaced to provincial capital Maymana. Others leaving the district in July and September 2019 looked for shelter in Balkh province and the IDPs registered in June 2019 stayed within the district. The majority of IDPs from Garziwan district were displaced within the district. This happened mainly in April 2019.¹⁴¹⁶ Another large group left Garziwan to seek shelter in Sar-e Pul district of the eponymous province in January 2020, at a time when ongoing fighting was reported from several districts in Faryab, including Garziwan.¹⁴¹⁷ No conflict-induced displacement was registered by UNOCHA from Maymana during the reporting period.¹⁴¹⁸

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 28 121 persons displaced to Faryab province. In addition to the 27 302 people displaced within the province, Faryab also hosted a few IDPs from Badghis, Balkh, Ghor, Jawzjan, Kunduz and Sar-e Pul provinces. Maymana hosted more than half of the people displaced to Faryab province in the reporting period and Andkhoy about one out of four.¹⁴¹⁹

¹⁴¹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 people suffer casualties in Faryab incidents, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴¹¹ WHO, Afghanistan, Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019 [url](#)

¹⁴¹² UNAMA, Special Report: Attacks On Healthcare During The Covid-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 9, 20

¹⁴¹³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Clashes leave Faryab capital, some districts in darkness, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁴ Tolonews, Ongoing Fighting In Six Districts of Faryab: Residents, 10 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (2 - 8 September 2019), 11 September 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 October – 20 October 2019), 24 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November 2019), 6 November 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (2 December – 8 December 2019), 11 December 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 January – 26 January 2020), 29 January 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (3 February – 9 February 2020), 12 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 14 June 2020, [url](#)

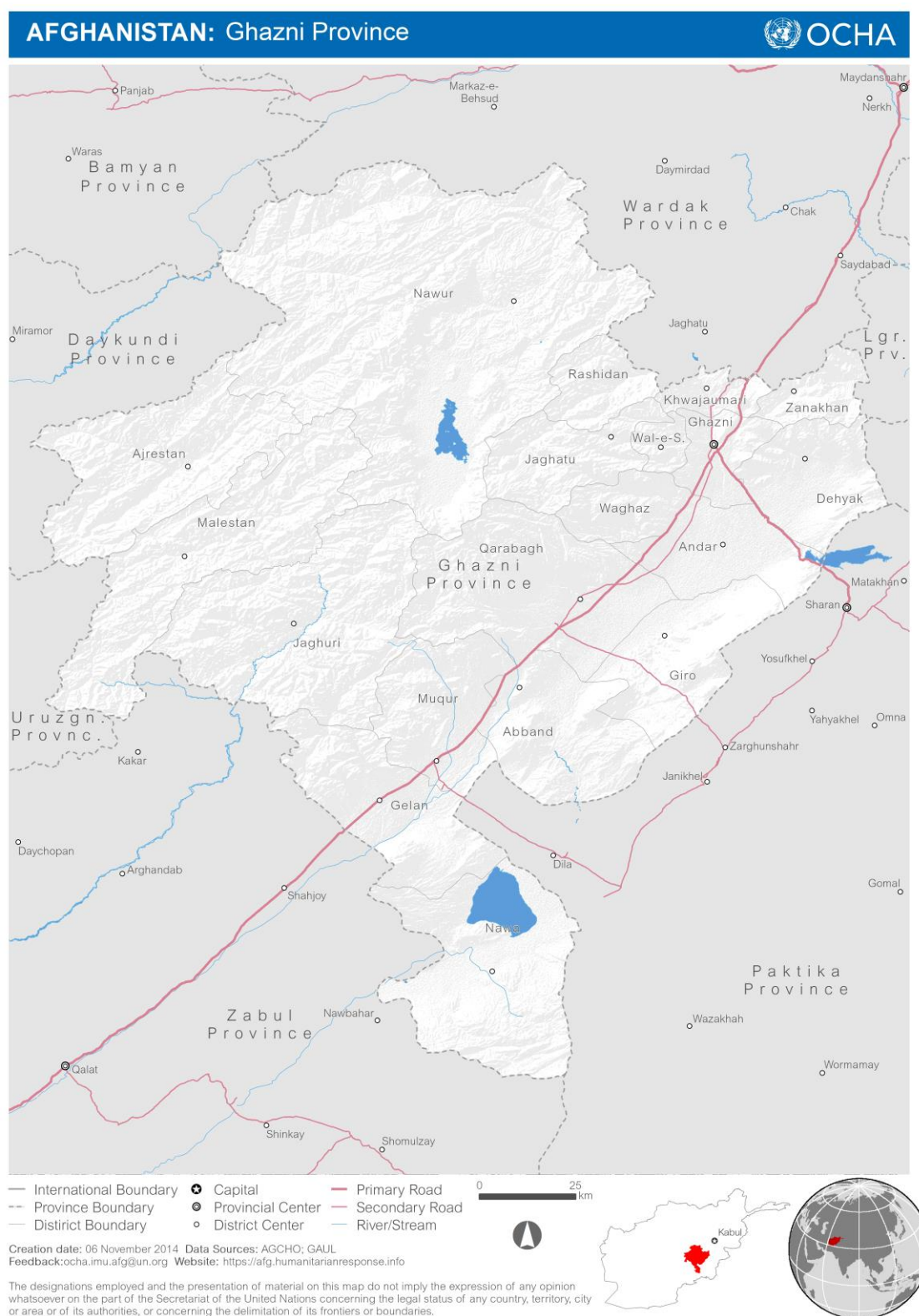
¹⁴¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 14 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴¹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (2 December – 8 December 2019), 11 December 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 December – 22 December 2019), 26 December 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, [url](#)

2.10 Ghazni

2.10.1 General description of the province



Map 10: Afghanistan – Ghazni province, source: UNOCHA¹⁴²⁰

¹⁴²⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Ghazni Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

The province of Ghazni is located in the south-east of Afghanistan, bordering the provinces of Bamyan and Wardak to the north, Logar, Paktya and Paktika to the east, Zabul to the south and Uruzgan and Daykundi to the west. Ghazni does not share an international border. The province is divided into the following administrative units: Ghazni, with the provincial capital of Ghazni City, Abband, Ajrestan, Andar, Dehyak, Gelan, Giro, Jaghatu, Jaghuri, Khwajaumari, Malestan, Muqur, Nawa, Nawur, Qarabagh, Rashidan, Waghaz, Walimuhammad-e Shahid (Khugyani), and Zanakhan.¹⁴²¹ The district of Andar is also known as Shelgar.¹⁴²²

NSIA estimated the population of Ghazni for 2020/21 at 1 362 504, with 68 993 of its residents living in the provincial capital of Ghazni City. Urban population constitutes about 5 % of all inhabitants of the province.¹⁴²³ Ghazni is inhabited by Pashtuns (49 %), Hazara (46 %), Tajiks (5 %), and other smaller minorities. Three districts – Jaghori, Malistan and Nawur – are inhabited exclusively by Hazara population. Kuchi nomads also inhabit Ghazni, and their presence in the province may differ throughout the year due to migration.¹⁴²⁴

The climate is harsh in the province but some isolated, remote districts (Nawur, Jaghori, Malistan inhabited by Hazara and Ajrestan predominantly Pashtun) suffer more than the others as access roads are closed by winter snow and by spring mud.¹⁴²⁵ A US military expert referred to Ghazni City as a ‘key intersection’, since it is situated on the Ring Road (or Highway One), connecting the capital Kabul with the major population centre of Kandahar in the south. Additionally, the road to Paktika's capital Sharan branches off the Ring Road in Ghazni City, while the road to Paktya's capital Gardez forks a bit north of Ghazni City. Hence, control over Ghazni is of strategic importance.¹⁴²⁶

According to the UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Ghazni province decreased by 67 % in 2019, compared to 2018.¹⁴²⁷

2.10.2 Conflict background and actors in Ghazni

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Ghazni province is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.¹⁴²⁸ The main military base in the province is called Camp Sultan.¹⁴²⁹ According to Afghan military officials in Ghazni, ANA does not have enough troops to hold the territory of the province. The army established a number of small outposts around the province to make larger checkpoints easier to defend. They quickly became a frequent target of Taliban nightly attacks.¹⁴³⁰ For example, in Andar district after a Taliban offensive in October 2018, the only sign of ANA presence was six military checkpoints and the only task for soldiers deployed there was not to surrender. Some of these bases were supplied by air without any land access. Other bases had road access but the Taliban still targeted the supply operations.¹⁴³¹ In order to supplement the presence of the ANP, ALP, and the NDS paramilitary forces, a newly established ANA Territorial Force (ANA TF) is being piloted in the Hazara district of Jaghori where two ANA TF companies were created in the absence of any long-term regular ANA presence.¹⁴³²

¹⁴²¹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 20

¹⁴²² Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., Uprising, ALP and Taleban in Andar: The arc of government failure, AAN, 22 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴²³ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁴²⁴ JUH/AADA, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Ghazni Province, Humanitarian Response, 01 Dec 2019 to 30 Dec 2019, December 2019, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁴²⁵ JUH/AADA, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Ghazni Province, Humanitarian Response, 01 Dec 2019 to 30 Dec 2019, December 2019, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁴²⁶ Clearance Jobs, Taliban Seizure of Ghazni City Returns Terror Organization to its Roots, 13 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁷ Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴²⁸ USDO, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁴²⁹ Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁰ Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴³¹ Muzhary F., One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province, AAN, 13 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴³² Clark, K., The Afghan Territorial Force: Learning from the lessons of the past?, AAN, 15 January 2019, [url](#)

The Taliban had ‘long-established significant influence’ in the province and dominated militarily¹⁴³³ with the provincial capital remaining an exception.¹⁴³⁴ In a case study on Andar district, in southern Ghazni, AAN noted that two parallel forms of government have operated for years, with a shadow Taliban administration in place since 2007. Since 2013, the Taliban have expanded their governance structure by collecting taxes, and by establishing several administrative commissions, including a finance commission, a commission for civilian casualties, a commission for prisoners, a commission for inviting government forces to surrender, a commission for cultural affairs and a commission for dealing with international NGOs; and from October 2018, Andar district has been ‘under virtually complete Taleban control’. While, the government plays an important role in providing health and education services and it is also responsible for ID cards distribution, in other aspects of daily life its role is highly limited. Local administration sometimes made informal agreements with Taliban regulating daily needs and services. AAN further noted that Andar district is the key location for Taliban in Ghazni as it was a command centre for attacks on different parts of the province. Most Taliban fighters currently active in Andar are locals, with very few outsiders. However, shadow governors of the Ghazni province used to be from Kandahar, while one of the Ghazni commanders from Andar is a shadow governor of Khost province.¹⁴³⁵

In the spring of 2019, ANA reportedly managed to recapture administrative centres in Deh Yak and Khwajah Omari districts.¹⁴³⁶ In September 2019, government sources reported that ANA managed to recapture also Jaghato, Malistan, Jaghori, Ajristan and Nawur districts.¹⁴³⁷ As of October 2019, the Taliban reportedly controlled almost all Pashtun populated districts of Ghazni, while government forces controlled Ghazni City and Hazara populated districts of the province.¹⁴³⁸ A joint report by the Johannite International Assistance (JUH) and Agency for Assistance and Development of Afghanistan (AADA), reported a deterioration of the general security situation in Ghazni province of as of December 2019. The source noted that there was a significant number of checkpoints across the province held by both the Taliban and government forces, stating that ‘the district centres are mostly controlled by the government and outside of the district centres are entirely under the control of Taliban. In some district centres like Qarabagh, Nawa, Andar which are entirely under control of Afghanistan security forces, but Taliban fighters are present in and around of a kilometre distance away.’¹⁴³⁹ In May 2020, local media reported that ANA managed to clear several villages in the outskirts of Ghazni City and in Andar district, during a 16-day operation where more than 100 Taliban fighters were killed.¹⁴⁴⁰

According to Afghan military sources quoted by the Stars and Stripes’ article, during the night, the Taliban pass through the villages in the province, even if they are not under their control. They sometimes plant roadside bombs or plan attacks on the government checkpoints. However, the Taliban only use small arms fire and the army can call in for artillery or air support when needed. On average, the main military base launches 80 shells per week.¹⁴⁴¹

¹⁴³³ Qaane, E., The Insecure Spring of Ghazni: Results of third-grade treatment by the centre?, AAN, 25 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁴ NYT, Taliban Kill More Than 200 Afghan Defenders on 4 Fronts: ‘A Catastrophe’, 12 August 2018, [url](#); Der Spiegel, Taliban-Offensive in Afghanistan Der Albtraum von Ghazni [Taliban Offensive in Afghanistan: The Nightmare of Ghazni], 15 August 2018, [url](#); Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, [url](#); Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁵ Muzhary F., One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province, AAN, 13 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁶ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 03 September 2019, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴³⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt retakes control of Ghazni’s Jaghato district, 22 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁸ Kabul Now, Taliban force people to pay extortion money, Ghazni councilman confirms, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴³⁹ JUH/AADA, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Ghazni Province, Humanitarian Response, 01 Dec 2019 to 30 Dec 2019, December 2019, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁴⁴⁰ Khamaa Press, Over 100 Taliban militants during a 16-day operation in Ghazni province, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴¹ Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, [url](#)

According to UNOCHA, Highway One was partially destroyed and contaminated with IEDs in August 2018.¹⁴⁴² In 2018 and 2019, the Ghazni-Paktika Highway was reported to be under Taliban control and closed for civilian and government vehicles, with the insurgents continuing to put pressure on the Kabul-Kandahar Highway.¹⁴⁴³ Since the beginning of 2019 Taliban established lots of checkpoints to extort money in some areas under their control. According to a member of Ghazni Provincial Council, they could collect AFN 15 million a day from each of the checkpoints they set across the Kabul-Ghazni Highway. According to local people, Taliban stopped every car, checked the passengers (their ID cards or mobile phones) and force them to pay money. According to army sources, during 2019, ANA tried to secure the highway and remove Taliban checkpoints.¹⁴⁴⁴

Citing Afghan officials, Stars and Stripes reported that, during 2019, government forces managed to retake ten Taliban-held districts and four Taliban-contested districts, including critical highways that connect Ghazni to the rest of the country. However the Afghan official 'acknowledged that the highways still had to be cleared of the Taliban's roadside bombs each morning'.¹⁴⁴⁵ In May 2020, 203rd Corps of Afghan Army managed to clear parts of the route linking Ghazni with Paktiya and Paktika provinces and established five military bases along the highway to ensure the security of the route.¹⁴⁴⁶

UNAMA documented also ISKP activity in Ghazni province which caused civilian casualties.¹⁴⁴⁷

In September 2019, the LWJ referred to Ghazni province as a 'known haven for al Qaeda', reporting that NDS forces supported by air forces killed 26 Al Qaeda fighters in Muqur district.¹⁴⁴⁸ According to Jamestown Foundation, some Al Qaeda cells were present in Ghazni province, where they found the shelter after Pakistani army offensive in tribal, remote region of Waziristan. However, Al Qaeda have lost many top leaders since 2017 in Ghazni. In March 2019, in Giro district, the Afghan army killed over 30 Al Qaeda fighters, including suicide bombers.¹⁴⁴⁹

2.10.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.10.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 673 civilian casualties (213 deaths and 460 injured) in Ghazni. This represents an increase of 3 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were suicide IEDs and non-suicide IEDs and ground engagements.¹⁴⁵⁰ Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Ghazni in the first quarter of 2020, reporting an increase in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of the year, with over 126 casualties recorded (from 1 April to 30 June 2020).¹⁴⁵¹

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported a total of 1 291 incidents related to security in Ghazni province: 830 battles, 423 remote violence, 38 cases of violence against civilians, mostly in the second part of 2019. In 2020 the number of security incidents and fatalities decreased.¹⁴⁵²

¹⁴⁴² UN News, 'No safe way' into battle-scarred Afghan city of Ghazni to deliver aid as traumatized children search for parents, 17 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴³ Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 months on, Ghazni-Paktika road remains shut 3 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁴ Kabul Now, Taliban force people to pay extortion money, Ghazni councilman confirms, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁵ Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁶ Khamaa Press, Over 100 Taliban militants during a 16-day operation in Ghazni province, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 36

¹⁴⁴⁸ LWJ, Taliban supplies al Qaeda with explosives for attacks in major Afghan cities, 16 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴⁹ Jamestown Foundation, Al-Qaeda's South Asian Branch Gravitating Toward Kashmir, 17 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹⁴⁵¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹⁴⁵² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Ghazni; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#)

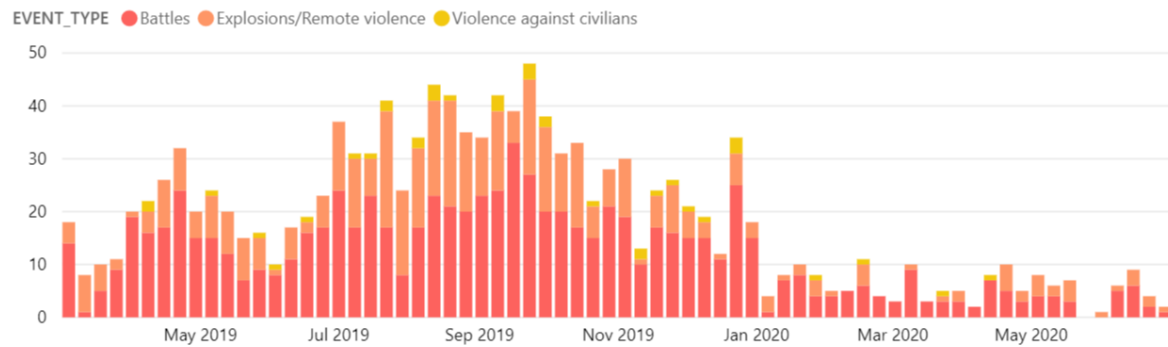


Figure 12. Ghazni - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data¹⁴⁵³

Throughout 2019 and the first months of 2020, Ghazni continued to be a major battlefield between Taliban insurgents and the Afghan government – backed by US forces. The intensification of military campaigns by the Afghan forces aiming at retaking key territorial areas of the province has made ‘life worse for civilians’ living this areas.¹⁴⁵⁴ According to some local respondents interviewed by AAN, full control of Taliban in some districts meant better security in terms of lower level of crime and freedom of movement.¹⁴⁵⁵ During clashes in 2019, the roads became impossible to use.¹⁴⁵⁶ Also, as a result of clashes and road blockades, people in need of emergency health care, reportedly, were not able to reach appropriate health care in time.¹⁴⁵⁷ Additionally, several health facilities in Ghazni province were damaged either due to conflict or natural disaster.¹⁴⁵⁸

The Taliban checkpoints along main roads in Ghazni province made travelling insecure, especially for government employees and university students.¹⁴⁵⁹ In June 2019, the Taliban reportedly stopped a car in the Qiyaq area of Jaghatu district, kidnapped and killed a university student who was travelling to Kabul.¹⁴⁶⁰ In September 2019, a civilian deputy police chief of Ghazni and another senior security official of Ghazni police were killed by the Taliban on the Kabul-Ghazni Highway in two separate attacks.¹⁴⁶¹ In December 2019, in Jaghatu district, an explosion of a pressure-plate IED planted by Taliban, killed 10 civilians travelling on the road from Daikundi to Ghazni.¹⁴⁶²

There were several cases of targeted killings in Ghazni City in 2019. In May 2019, the Taliban kidnapped and killed a military prosecutor and a government official from Zabul province. A local reporter was shot in his leg while travelling on a motorbike with his wife on 27 September 2019. In October 2019, the Taliban killed an attorney. On 10 December 2019, the head of the Disabled and Martyrs Department was killed by unidentified armed group.¹⁴⁶³

According to AAN, ‘following the capture of Andar by the Taliban in October 2018, the district has experienced a considerable increase in night raids, drone activity, airstrikes, search operations and

¹⁴⁵³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Ghazni; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

¹⁴⁵⁴ Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁵ Muzhary F., One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province, AAN, 13 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵⁶ Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 71

¹⁴⁵⁷ JUH/AADA, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Ghazni Province, Humanitarian Response, 01 December 2019, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁴⁵⁸ JUH/AADA, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Ghazni Province, Humanitarian Response, 01 December 2019, [url](#), p. 28

¹⁴⁵⁹ Kabul Now, Taliban force people to pay extortion money, Ghazni councilman confirms, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶¹ Kabul Now, Taliban force people to pay extortion money, Ghazni councilman confirms, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 42

¹⁴⁶³ ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Ghazni; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

ground fighting between militants and US special forces-backed Afghan forces. These have resulted in the killing of both civilians and Taliban fighters, as well as the destruction of the district governor's compound. Civilians have also been detained and beaten'.¹⁴⁶⁴ According to Afghan military sources, in case of clashes in populated areas, the risk of civilian casualties grew as the use of artillery and air strikes were the only effective weapon of ANA against Taliban forces.¹⁴⁶⁵ On 30 March 2019, a mortar round fired during the clash between ANA and Taliban hit the school in Andar district. Four students and a teacher were killed and 18 others were injured.¹⁴⁶⁶

There were also reports of search operations conducted by Afghan security forces during which people were harassed. According to locals, Taliban usually do not undertake house to house searches.¹⁴⁶⁷ According to ACLED, in June 2019, Afghan forces started shooting at people who refused to show their ID cards, killing one person.¹⁴⁶⁸ On 10 September 2019, Afghan and US forces raided and destroyed a village in Giro district, five civilians were killed, two wounded. The Afghan army also destroyed two mosques, a school and two houses.¹⁴⁶⁹ In April 2020, there were violent protests in Jaghori after two local policemen allegedly raped two women from the district. Protestors clashed with the police and one person was killed and nine other wounded as police opened fire to the gathering.¹⁴⁷⁰

Attacks by ISKP against civilians in Ghazni province were also reported. On 5 July 2019, IKSP detonated a remote-controlled IED in the Shia Muhammadiyah Mosque in Ghazni City; two people were killed and 22 were injured, including children. On 8 October 2019, another IED was detonated in a classroom of Ghazni University, killing or injuring 27 students, most of them women.¹⁴⁷¹

2.10.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 3 742 persons displaced from and within Ghazni province. Most of them were displaced from Dehyak district and were resettled to Ghazni City.¹⁴⁷² The major reason for displacement was active conflict, followed by drought. In Dehyak district, ground engagement and air strikes increased in 2019, but the population often received prior warning from insurgents.¹⁴⁷³

291 persons from various districts of Ghazni province were displaced to Kabul City, 75 persons from Malestan district left for Injil district, Herat province and two families (14 persons) were displaced to Qala-e Kah in Farah province. No conflict-induced internal displacement to Ghazni province from other provinces was reported by UNOCHA in the reporting period.¹⁴⁷⁴

¹⁴⁶⁴ Muzhary F., One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province, AAN, 13 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁵ Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, February 2020, [url](#), p. 71

¹⁴⁶⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 71

¹⁴⁶⁷ JUH/AADA, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Ghazni Province, Humanitarian Response, 01 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 19-20

¹⁴⁶⁸ ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Ghazni; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶⁹ ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Ghazni; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁰ Tolonews, 1 Protestor Killed as Ghazni Protest Turns Violent 28 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 48

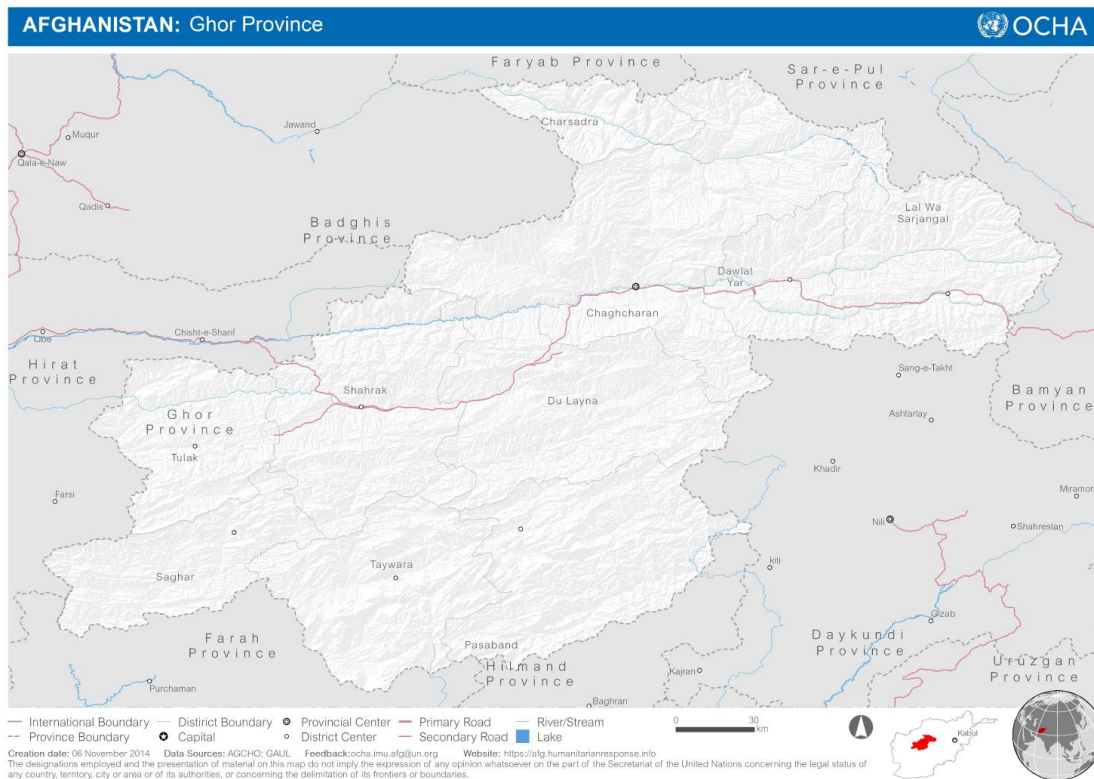
¹⁴⁷² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷³ Humanitarian Response, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Ghazni Province, 01 December 2019, [url](#) p. 20

¹⁴⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

2.11 Ghor

2.11.1 General description of the province



Map 11: Afghanistan – Ghor province, source: UNOCHA¹⁴⁷⁵

The province of Ghor is located in central towards north-western Afghanistan and does not share an international border. It is surrounded by the provinces of Herat and Badghis to the west, Faryab and Sar-e Pul to the north, Bamiyan and Daykundi to the east, and Helmand and Farah to the south. Ghor province is divided into the following administrative units: Chaghcharan (Firozkoh), Charsadra, Dawlatyar, Du Layna, Lal Wa Sarjantal, Pasaband, Saghar, Shahrak, Taywara, and Tulak. The provincial capital is Chaghcharan.¹⁴⁷⁶ The provincial capital of Ghor is called Feroz Koh or Chaghcharan, Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA), the national broadcasting corporation of Afghanistan, stated that Chaghcharan was renamed to Firozkoh in 2014.¹⁴⁷⁷ Afghanistan, NSIA referred to Chaghcharan as the provincial capital of Ghor in June 2020.¹⁴⁷⁸

Afghanistan, NSIA estimated the population of Ghor at 764 472 in 2019/20.¹⁴⁷⁹ According to the provincial profile published by the US Naval Postgraduate School, the largest ethnic group in Ghor are Tajiks, followed by Hazaras, Aimaqs and a small number of Pashtuns and Uzbeks¹⁴⁸⁰; RFE/RL stated that Aimaqs constitute the majority of Ghor.¹⁴⁸¹ The Aimaqs are 'loosely related to the Hazara, and to some degree the Tajiks' according to the US Naval Postgraduate School.¹⁴⁸²

¹⁴⁷⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Ghor Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁶ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Ghor, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., [url](#), P. 33

¹⁴⁷⁷ RTA article published at Baztab news portal, Ghor province, 11 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷⁸ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., [url](#), P. 33

¹⁴⁷⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., [url](#), P. 33

¹⁴⁸⁰ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Ghor Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁴⁸¹ RFE/RL, Female Afghan Governor Won't Back Down Amid Threats, Controversy, 19 October 2015, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸² US, Naval Postgraduate School, Ghor Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Ghor was not among the ten main opium poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018.¹⁴⁸³ Compared to 2017, opium-poppy cultivation reportedly decreased by 15 % in 2018. The main opium-poppy cultivating districts have been Chaghcharan, Pasaband, and Taywara.¹⁴⁸⁴ According to AAN, in 2019, opium-poppy cultivation in the western provinces including in Ghor has decreased by 23 % compared to 2018.¹⁴⁸⁵

2.11.2 Conflict background and actors in Ghor

According to AAN, 'Ghor is known for its particularly confusing pattern of conflicts, involving insurgent groups and 'freelancing' militias, the dividing line between which is all but hermetic [...].'¹⁴⁸⁶ Besides Taliban insurgents, armed groups partially affiliated to political parties in the central government are present in the province. According to AAN, the 'insurgent' activities of some groups can be hardly distinguished from crime and allegiances have been shifting several times in the past.¹⁴⁸⁷ During the period of 2017 and 2018, the absence of rule of law and government was allegedly a particular pressing problem in Ghor.¹⁴⁸⁸

AAN reported in November 2016 of a network of militants active in the district of Chaghcharan, which maintained close links to the political party and former militia, Jamiat-e Islami, but also with established links to the Taliban after 2010. It was said to sympathise with ISKP after 2015 – even though AAN stated that claims of an IS-affiliation of the group proved wrong. While the network's criminal activities led to protests and resistance of local residents, the government forces' weak presence in Ghor, as well as the network's affiliation with Jamiat reportedly prevented its disarmament. On the contrary, after fighting between the group and the Taliban erupted, provincial officials treated the group as a 'popular uprising' force and the ANSF provided logistical support for the fight against the Taliban. However, when ANSF launched a clearing operation against the network in the wake of protests caused by the killing of more than 30 civilians by the network in 2016, the Taliban allegedly fought against ANSF, as they perceived the presence of government forces as a threat against their strongholds in neighbouring Charsada district.¹⁴⁸⁹ Furthermore, according to an AAN report of 2017, an MP from Ghor province stated that affiliates of Hezb-i-Islami, a rival party to Jamiat-e Islami, distributed a large quantity of weapons to their supporters in Ghor.¹⁴⁹⁰ According to Pajhwok Afghan News, two sons of a former Hezb-i-Islami commander died in a clash with Taliban insurgents in January 2018. The fighting reportedly erupted over the collection of *ushr* taxes, respectively a leadership dispute between the former Hezb-i-Islami commander and Taliban insurgents.¹⁴⁹¹

In August 2019, Etilaatroz cited Mohammad Mehdi, deputy provincial council for Ghor province, stating that the Taliban strength in Ghor province has weakened after *Mawlawi* Zarif deputy [commander] of Red Unit of the Taliban militants has been killed by the security forces. According to the source Mehdi indicated [informal translation] 'government and public uprising forces control Tolak, Shahrak, Saghar, Tyora, Pasaband, Dawlatyar district centres.' According to the source, Mehdi added that due to the lack of security forces, the Taliban are present in remote areas of Ghor province [...] public uprising forces keep the security of governmental buildings in the province. The source also cited Abdul Rahim Rezazadeh, member of provincial council of Ghor confirming the presence of Taliban in remote areas

¹⁴⁸³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁴⁸⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 33

¹⁴⁸⁵ AAN, New world drug report: opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁶ Ruttig, T., The 'Humvee Bomb' Series: The October wave of Taleban attacks in 2017 context, AAN, 7 November 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁷ Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁸ NYT, Seesaw Conflict With Taliban Takes Toll in Fallen Afghan District, 7 August 2017, [url](#); NYT, No Justice, 'No Value' for Women in a Lawless Afghan Province, 7 July 2017, [url](#); IWPR, Afghanistan: Women Abused in Lawless Ghor, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸⁹ Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁰ Ruttig, T., A Matter of Registration: Factional tensions in Hezb-e Islami, AAN, 25 November 2017, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill HIA commander's sons in Ghor clash, 13 January 2018, [url](#)

of Ghor province.¹⁴⁹² Taliban claimed that in 2019 they took the control of Charsada district centre of Ghor province.¹⁴⁹³

In December 2019 and January 2020, around 88 Taliban fighters surrendered to the government forces in Ghor province amongst whom 18 surrendered to join the peace process and other 70 due to continued military pressure by the ANDSF.¹⁴⁹⁴ According to Kabul Now (local media), in February 2020, the Taliban maintained full control in many Ghor districts.¹⁴⁹⁵ During the same period, AAN reported that there were several fighting actors present in many of the nine remote districts of Ghor province, including illegal and criminal armed groups, the Taliban and ANDSF.¹⁴⁹⁶ According to information by LWJ collected and presented in a map, Charsada, Dawlat Yar, Taywara, Pasaband and Tulak districts of Ghor province were contested.¹⁴⁹⁷

In March 2020, Ariana News quoted MoD claiming the killing of *Qari* Rauf, a Taliban shadow governor for Lal Wa Sarjangal district, and several other Taliban fighters including *Qari* Niyatullah [...] from Zarzughal village and IEDs fabricator for Taliban.¹⁴⁹⁸

In May 2020, the UN Security Council indicated that the Taliban shadow governor for Ghor was *Mawlawi* Abdul Qayum Rohani Noorzai.¹⁴⁹⁹ In June 2020, Afghanistan Times cited Fakhruddin, police chief of Pasaband district, stating that the deputy governor of Taliban for Ghor province was Mullah Ahmadshah¹⁵⁰⁰, who entered Pasaband district with the Taliban shadow governor and over 200 militants on motorbikes.¹⁵⁰¹ In June 2020, another source mentioned two names 'Mustafa and Mikhail' as Taliban high ranking commanders for Ghor province.¹⁵⁰²

The ANSF conducted military operations in Ghor in 2018.¹⁵⁰³ According to a report of January 2019, the newly established ANA TF will be stationed 'soon' in several districts of Ghor.¹⁵⁰⁴

The 207th Zafar Corps is in charge of ANA operations in the province of Ghor.¹⁵⁰⁵ As part of the RS (Resolute Support), Italian forces provide 'functionality-based' security assistance to ANA 207th Corps and ANP in the west of Afghanistan including Ghor.¹⁵⁰⁶

¹⁴⁹² Etilaatroz, بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه [informal translation: 'security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban's mobility to heavy losses of the group'], 30 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹³ Voice of Jihad, د تېر کال فتوحاتو ته ځغلنده کتنه [informal translation: 'a quick look at last year's victories'], 31 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁴ Salaam Times, Taliban fighters surrendering in Ghor pledge support against former comrades, 2 December 2019, [url](#); Salaam Times, Increased military pressure forces 70 Taliban fighters to surrender in Ghor, 14 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁵ Kabul Now, Women exchanged for weapons in parts of Ghor, 1 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁶ AAN, Placating Ghor, for now: ten-days protest pushed the government to respond, 5 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁷ LWJ, Several Districts Change Hands as Fighting Rages in Northern Afghanistan, 1 July 2020, [url](#), however the source does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated

¹⁴⁹⁸ Ariana News, Taliban shadow district governor among 10 dead – Ghor, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹⁹ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁵⁰⁰ Afghanistan Times, Seven security forces killed in Ghor Taliban attack, 13 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰¹ Afghanistan times, Ghor's Pasaband district at risk of collapse to Taliban, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰² Pasbanan, Nine police were killed in Ghor province, 13 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰³ Tolonews, Casualties Rise Amid Heavy Clashes In 10 Provinces, 13 May 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Scores of rebels, security personnel killed in clashes, 14 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁴ Tolonews, Territorial Army To Begin Mission In West, 14 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰⁵ Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url](#); USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 59

¹⁵⁰⁶ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

2.11.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.11.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 77 civilian casualties, including 62 killed and 15 injured in Ghor province, which represents 20 % increase compared to 2018. The leading causes of casualties were Target/deliberate killings, ground engagements and Non-Suicide IEDs.¹⁵⁰⁷ According to SIGAR, RS (Resolute Support) recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Ghor province during the first quarter of 2020¹⁵⁰⁸, and the mentioned source recorded between 51 and 75 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020.¹⁵⁰⁹

According to ACLED data, between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 there were 222 security incidents recorded in Ghor province, of which 145 were coded as battles, 56 remote violence and 21 incidents of violence against civilians.

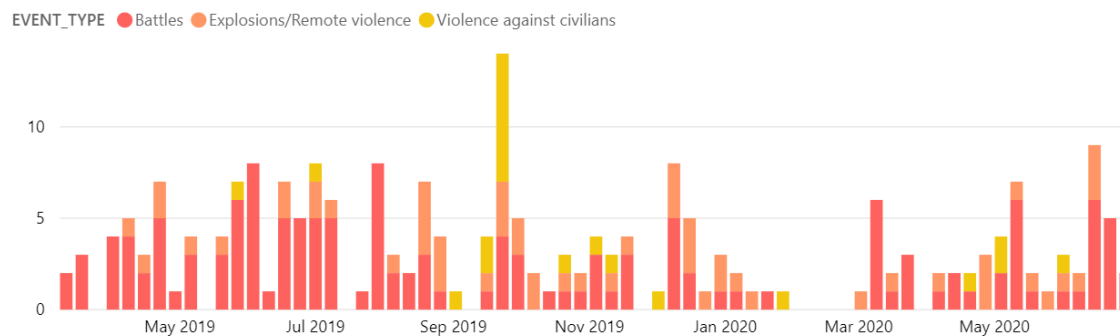


Figure 13. Ghor - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data¹⁵¹⁰

In 2019, violent conflict¹⁵¹¹ and lack of security in several remote districts of Ghor province was reported.¹⁵¹² Tolonews quoted Rahila Rahmanzada, women rights activist, stating that there were 113 cases of violence against women including stoning during kangaroo courts¹⁵¹³ in Ghor province as of 21 December 2019.¹⁵¹⁴ According to the head of Mine Action Coordination, cited by Tolonews in 2019 in Ghor province, 22 people were killed and 16 wounded due to the explosion of unexploded ordnance.¹⁵¹⁵ In May 2020, Afghanistan Times reported on an increasing number of informal courts in Ghor province, where local religious and tribal leaders or influential figures punish people accused of crimes.¹⁵¹⁶

Recent incidents that caused civilian casualties in Ghor province in 2019 and 2020 include: on 8 June 2019, Taliban attacked security outposts in Poshta Noor village in Dawlatyar district of Ghor, killing at least fifteen members of the public uprising forces and civilians, and as well as wounding a

¹⁵⁰⁷ UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹⁵⁰⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

¹⁵⁰⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹⁵¹⁰ Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Ghor; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵¹¹ AAN, Placating Ghor, for now: ten-days protest pushed the government to respond, 5 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵¹² Tolonews, "Lack of security means more violence against women in Ghor", 21 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹³ A Kangaroo court (*محکمه صحرایه Mahkam-e Sahrayee* in Dari) is an improvised court organized by the Taliban to punish victims publicly including shooting, hanging, stoning etc., and aimed at spreading violence and intimidating people, Salaam Times, Taliban brutality takes center stage with couple's execution in Ghor, 28 April 2020, [url](#); AIHRC, نتیجه

بررسی های کمیسیون در رابطه با تصاویر ویدیویی از سنگسار یک خانم در ولایت غور [informal translation 'the result of commission's enquiry concerning the videos of stoning of a woman in Ghor province'], 10 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁴ Tolonews, "Lack of security means more violence against women in Ghor", 21 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁵ Tolonews, 100 of civilian casualties caused by unexploded ordnance in 2019, 20 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁶ Afghanistan Times, Drumhead courts-martials in rise in Ghor, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

tribal leader and two others¹⁵¹⁷; on 4 July 2019, one civilian was killed and another wounded when the Taliban attacked the office of the local pro-government militia in Dawlatyar district¹⁵¹⁸; on 8 July 2019, six children were killed in an explosion¹⁵¹⁹; on 23 July 2019, one civilian was killed when a roadside bomb, placed close to the district council compound in Dawlatyar district, exploded¹⁵²⁰; on 20 August 2019, two civilians, a father and his son, were killed and the man's wife was wounded by a roadside bomb while they were travelling by motorcycle in the Midan Barra Khanah area of Firozkoh (provincial capital)¹⁵²¹; on 24 August 2019, two civilians were reportedly killed in a roadside bomb in the same area¹⁵²²; on 1 September 2019, four civilians were killed, and seven were wounded when multiple bombs detonated in Firozkoh City¹⁵²³; on 25 September 2019, a roadside bomb explosion killed one civilian and wounded another one in Firozkoh district¹⁵²⁴; on 9 October 2019, two civilians were killed, and four wounded in a roadside bomb planted by the Taliban hitting their vehicle while travelling from Kabul to the Sheniya village of Dawlat Yar district. Additionally, an ambulance, which arrived to the area to evacuate the victims, was also blown up by a roadside bomb, wounding the driver¹⁵²⁵; on 13 October 2019, a roadside bomb, which exploded near a vehicle in the village of Band-e Bayan in Lal Wa Sarjangan district, killed two women who were moving to Herat province.¹⁵²⁶ on 21 October 2019, a 22-year-old woman was killed at home when the Taliban fired several mortars on the village of Mang in Chahar Sadah district¹⁵²⁷; on 10 November 2019, one civilian was killed during a clash between the Taliban and Afghan security forces when the latter's convoy was ambushed in the village of Dahan-e Alander in Firozkoh¹⁵²⁸; on 29 May 2020, one child was killed and another was injured in a bomb blast in Pozalich village of Firozkoh, the provincial capital¹⁵²⁹; on 10 June 2020, a bomb, reportedly planted by the Taliban, exploded in Tarbulaq village of Du Layan district killed one child and wounded three others¹⁵³⁰; on 17 June 2020, a roadside bomb, planted by the Taliban, went off in the village of Pa-i Kamar in Firozkoh district killing three children¹⁵³¹; on 19 June 2020, a roadside bomb planted by the Taliban went off in Somak village of Dawlat Yar district killing one civilian on his motorcycle.¹⁵³²

2.11.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 10 512 persons displaced from Ghor province, with 93 % displaced within the province itself (mainly in the provincial capital Chaghcharan), 6 % were displaced into Herat province and the remaining 1 % were displaced into Faryab province.¹⁵³³

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 10 036 persons displaced to Ghor province, with almost 99 % coming from within the province itself.¹⁵³⁴

¹⁵¹⁷ Tolonews, several killed in Taliban attack in Ghor: Officials, 8 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-4 July, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵¹⁹ Save the Children, At least 25 children hospitalised after Ghazni car bomb attack, 8 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵²¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵²² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵²³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵²⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

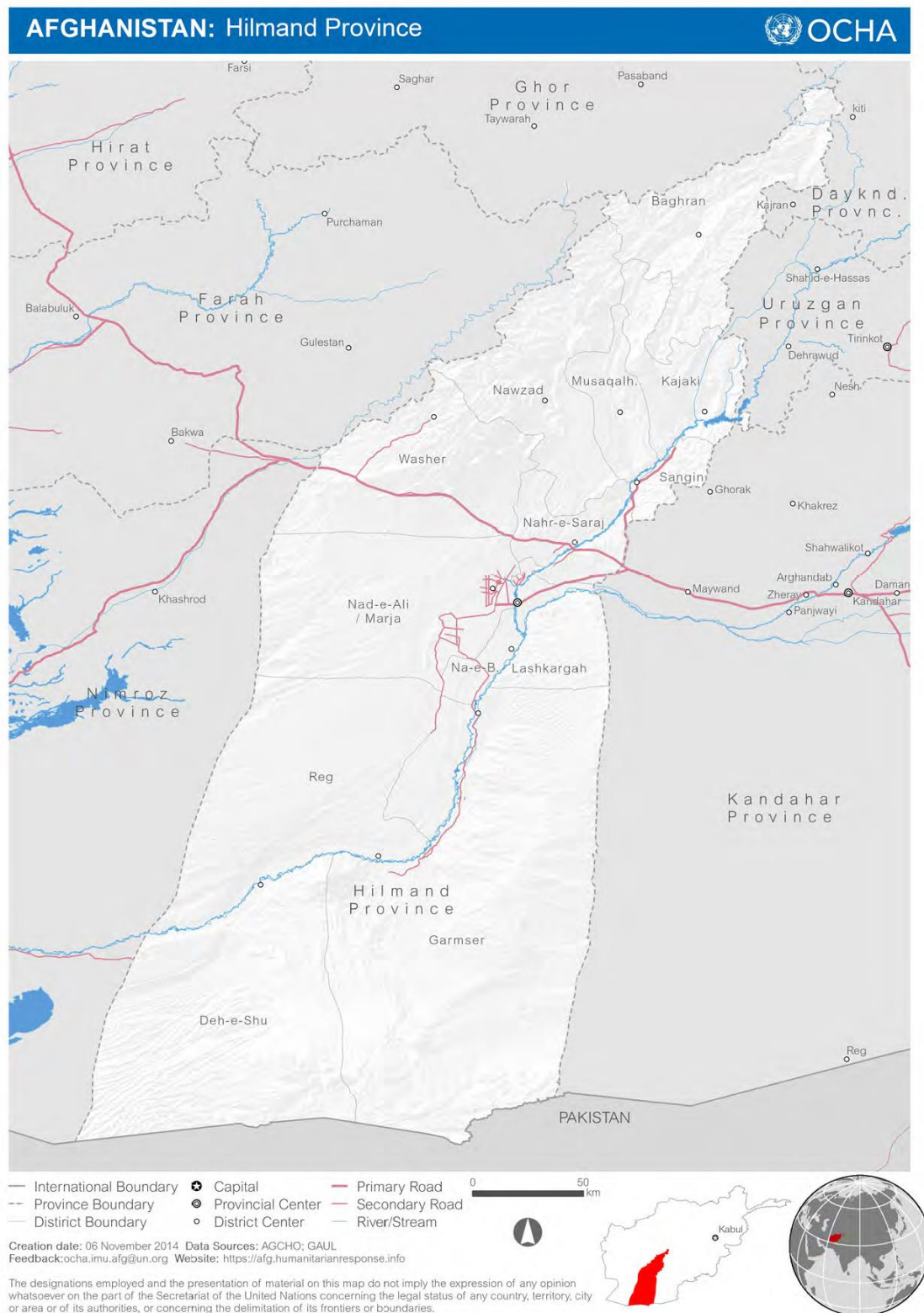
During the period of 28 April – 4 May 2020, the ongoing conflict displaced 400 families (around 2 800 individuals) in Badghis and Ghor provinces.¹⁵³⁵ Salaam Times reported that, in April 2020, due to the Taliban attacks hundreds of families had to leave their homes in Shahrak district [...] and were displaced to Firozkoh district.¹⁵³⁶

¹⁵³⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Weekly humanitarian update, 24 April – 4 May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³⁶ Salaam Times, An insult to Islam: Taliban attack in Ghor forces hundreds to flee during Ramadan, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

2.12 Helmand

2.12.1 General description of the province



Map 12: Afghanistan – Helmand province, source: UNOCHA¹⁵³⁷

¹⁵³⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Helmand Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

The province of Helmand is situated in southern Afghanistan, bordering the provinces of Nimroz, and Farah to the west, Ghor, and Daykundi to the north, and Uruzgan, as well as Kandahar to the east. In the south, Helmand shares a 162-kilometre border with Pakistan along the Durand line.¹⁵³⁸ Helmand is the largest province of Afghanistan.¹⁵³⁹ It is divided into the following administrative units: Nad Ali, Nawa-e-Barikzayi (Nawa), Nahr-e-Saraj (Gereshk/Grishk), Washer, Garm Ser, Nawzad, Sangin, Musa Qala, Kajaki, Reg-e-Khan Nishin (Reg), Baghran, Dishu, Lashkargah, , Marja (formerly part of Nad-e-Ali¹⁵⁴⁰), and Nawamish. The provincial capital of Helmand is Lashkargah.¹⁵⁴¹ Hazara-dominated Nawamish was reportedly split from the Pashtun-majority district of Baghran by a presidential order in March 2016. In June 2017, its administrative affairs were transferred to neighbouring Daykundi province.¹⁵⁴²

According to NSIA, the population of Helmand is estimated at 1 446 230 for 2020/21. Urban population, living mainly in the provincial capital Lashkargah, constitutes slightly more than 7 % of all inhabitants.¹⁵⁴³ The majority of Helmand's residents are reportedly Pashtuns, with a Baloch minority in the south at the border to the Pakistani province Balochistan¹⁵⁴⁴ and with some Hazara minority in the north.¹⁵⁴⁵ While Helmand's northern districts – Baghran, Kajaki and Musa Qala – are mainly populated by members of the Alizai tribe, the districts of Marja and Nad-e-Ali are more heterogeneous, inhabited by Nurzai, Ishaqzai, Alizai, Alekozai, and several smaller tribes. The Ishaqzai are allegedly '[...] one of the most religiously conservative tribes across Afghanistan'¹⁵⁴⁶, with the late Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur belonging to this tribe.¹⁵⁴⁷

According to AAN, the more heterogeneous composition of the districts in the south of Helmand was the result of a large-scale irrigation and agriculture project mainly funded by USAID until 1970, which created new arable land to be cultivated by so-called *naqileen* – i.e. Pashtuns from other parts of Afghanistan.¹⁵⁴⁸ Author Carter Malkesian noted that this allegedly led to a rift in Helmand's society and the *naqileen* predominantly allied with the Taliban against the older landed tribes, particularly in the district of Garm Ser in southern Helmand.¹⁵⁴⁹

The province has a 'significant geo-strategic importance'.¹⁵⁵⁰ A section of the Ring Road runs through the districts of Nahr-e-Saraj, Sangin and Washer¹⁵⁵¹, connecting major population centre Herat in the west with Kandahar in the east and eventually the capital Kabul.¹⁵⁵² However, according to Tolonews, as of January 2020, the five districts in Helmand province had no road access due to Taliban presence.¹⁵⁵³ A domestic airport with scheduled passenger service reportedly exists in Helmand's capital Lashkargah.¹⁵⁵⁴

¹⁵³⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Recognition of southern Helmand province, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵³⁹ Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁰ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴¹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 40

¹⁵⁴² Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴³ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, [url](#), pp. 7, 40

¹⁵⁴⁴ Naval Postgraduate School, Helmand Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁵ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁶ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁷ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#); Guardian (The), Why capturing Helmand is top of the Taleban's strategic goals, 26 December 2015, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁸ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴⁹ Malkasian, C., War Comes to Garmser: Thirty Years of Conflict on the Afghan Frontier, 2013, p. 266

¹⁵⁵⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Recognition of southern Helmand province, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵⁵¹ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵² Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, [url](#); Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵³ Tolonews, Efforts Underway to Clear 5 Helmand Districts of Insurgents, 10 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁴ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

Helmand is one of Afghanistan's most fertile regions, with a climate favouring the cultivation of a variety of crops – including opium –, and Helmand river providing the necessary irrigation through a 'relatively organized' canal system.¹⁵⁵⁵

According to the UNODC data obtained by AAN, Helmand province is situated in the region which the largest producer of opium in the world. However, in 2019 poppy cultivation in Helmand province decreased by 38 % in 2019, compared to 2018.¹⁵⁵⁶ The province's pivotal role for opium poppy cultivation allegedly contributes considerably to its strategic importance for the Taliban: whoever controls Helmand is rewarded with large-scale revenues, according to several accounts.¹⁵⁵⁷

2.12.2 Conflict background and actors in Helmand

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Helmand province is under the responsibility of the 215th ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southwest (TF Southwest), led by US forces.¹⁵⁵⁸

Local authorities stated in January 2020 that ANA has too little troops to maintain or retake the checkpoints from Taliban but army officials denied it.¹⁵⁵⁹ On the government side, along with Afghan security forces such as the ANP, ALP, ANA, some various pro-government 'uprising forces' took active part in fighting. One of the local initiatives of this type is also the Sangorian Group.¹⁵⁶⁰ The Sangorian was allegedly established in January 2016 by the operational commander of the Afghan forces in Helmand as a covert anti-Taliban militia with the aim of infiltrating and weakening the Taliban from within. Its fighters are locals, Taliban dissidents and former Taliban insurgents, however according to the media reports, Afghan government denied its existence.¹⁵⁶¹

In 2012, expert Antonio Giustozzi explained that the conflict in Helmand was driven by several factors including weak governance and corruption of the government, but also inter and intra tribal rivalries, competition between criminal networks over narcotic routes and resources, and outdated, dysfunctional social structures based on feudal landlords. Moreover, Taliban managed to receive large amounts of money from drug trade which made them self-sufficient.¹⁵⁶² After the international troops largely withdrew in 2014, the Taliban overran several 'chiefdoms' in Helmand, which had been under control of ANP, ALP and pro-government militia commanders.¹⁵⁶³ In 2017, US Marines returned to Helmand after three years, reportedly in order to advise Afghan government forces and to increase air strikes without conducting ground operations on their own.¹⁵⁶⁴ The aim of the Marine's deployment in Helmand was to secure the provincial capital Lashkargah from falling to the Taliban; the Afghan security forces reportedly remained dependent on US support in order to stay on the offensive.¹⁵⁶⁵ In 2017, BBC reported that the Taliban captured nearly 85 % of Helmand province, making the cities of Sangin and Musa Qala the centre of its command and commerce. However, the schools, at least for boys, and hospitals in both towns were funded and inspected by the government in Kabul. According to locals interviewed by BBC, areas entirely under Taliban control experienced less fighting and there was a

¹⁵⁵⁵ Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁶ Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁷ N-TV, Taliban auf dem Vormarsch: In Helmand geht es um Afghanistans Zukunft [Taliban on the rise: Afghanistan's future at the stake in Helmand], 23 December 2015, [url](#); Guardian (The), Why capturing Helmand is top of the Taleban's strategic goals, 26 December 2015, [url](#); Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁵⁵⁹ Tolonews, Efforts Underway to Clear 5 Helmand Districts of Insurgents, 10 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁰ Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 11 January 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Secret Afghan Force Mimics, Infiltrates Taliban, 15 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶¹ Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 11 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶² Giustozzi A. ed. Decoding the New Taliban, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 151, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶³ Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, [url](#); Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, AAN, 11 March 2016, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁴ LA Times, The Marines Returned To Helmand Province. Is Their Mission A Blueprint For Trump's Afghanistan Strategy?, 15 November 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁵ LA Times, The Marines Returned To Helmand Province. Is Their Mission A Blueprint For Trump's Afghanistan Strategy?, 15 November 2017, [url](#); Quilty A., Static War: Helmand after the US Marines' return, 23 April 2020, [url](#)

meaningful rise in trade but some personal freedoms were limited.¹⁵⁶⁶ Soon the provincial capital Lashkargah also became surrounded and on the brink of collapse.¹⁵⁶⁷

Since 2018, ANSF supported by US marines conducted several offensive operations called ‘Maiwand’ and managed to push Taliban away from certain districts and to clear some parts of local roads. In the consequence, Taliban reportedly lost a lot of commanders and fighters.¹⁵⁶⁸

The LWJ reported that the Taliban fully control 7 of 14 districts: Baghran, Musa Qala, Naw Zad, Sangin, Ghorak, Deh-e Shu, Reg-e Khan, the rest of the districts are marked as contested. The provincial capital and its surroundings are regularly stormed by AGEs but until now the government defended the city.¹⁵⁶⁹ In December 2019, Tolonews reported that the government forces managed to recapture Marja district after four years.¹⁵⁷⁰

According to the AAN, as of April 2020, ‘although the US air campaign has kept significant pressure on the Taliban throughout the province since early to mid-2018, aside from Nawa, the only area the government appears to have retaken and held is Malgir; adding that ‘for now, the goal of the fighting there, as recently witnessed along the canal, on both sides, seems to be about maintaining the status quo.’¹⁵⁷¹

As a consequence of US-Taliban agreement signed in February 2020, US troops started leaving the military base in Lashkargah in March 2020.¹⁵⁷² On 4 March 2020, US forces in Helmand attacked the Taliban, 11 days after the agreement, responding to the Taliban attack on ANDSF checkpoints. The commander of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, General Miller, said that the United States would continue the air strikes in support of government army and police if they were attacked by the Taliban.¹⁵⁷³

Besides the Taliban, Al Qaeda is allegedly present in Helmand and closely collaborates with the Taliban – even though the Pentagon reportedly stated that the two groups do not maintain strategic relationships.¹⁵⁷⁴

According to the news magazine The Diplomat, as of September 2018, there has been no known presence of Islamic State (IS) fighters in Helmand.¹⁵⁷⁵

2.12.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.12.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 675 civilian casualties (284 deaths and 391 injured) in Helmand province. This represents a decrease of 23 % compared to 2019. Although the number of victims remains high, UNAMA reported that it has decreased since 2017, particularly in case of ground engagement victims.¹⁵⁷⁶ Resolute Support recorded between 76 and 100 civilian casualties in Helmand in the first

¹⁵⁶⁶ BBC, Taliban territory: Life in Afghanistan under the militants, 8 June 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁷ Quilty A., Static War: Helmand after the US Marines’ return, AAN, 23 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁸ Quilty A., Static War: Helmand after the US Marines’ return, AAN, 23 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶⁹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Tolonews, Helmand’s Marjah Cleared of ‘Insurgents’ After Four Years, 1 December 2019, [url](#); Military Times, US troops and A-10s return to Marjah fight, 3 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷¹ Quilty A., Static War: Helmand after the US Marines’ return, AAN, 23 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷² Bangkok Post, US begins military pullout from two Afghan bases 11 March 2020, [url](#); Stars and Stripes, US troops have left bases in Helmand, Laghman provinces, officials say, 13 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷³ Military Times, US resumes airstrikes against Taliban to halt attack on Afghan forces, 04 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁴ LWJ, Afghan forces target al Qaeda commanders in Helmand and Nangarhar, 7 August 2018, [url](#); Institute for the Study of War, Al Qaeda Expands its Presence in Afghanistan, 23 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁵ Diplomat (The), The Last 2 Sikhs in the Taliban’s Heartland, 26 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 69, 94

six months of 2020, with no variation in number between the first and second quarter of 2020.¹⁵⁷⁷ According to UNAMA, leading causes of civilian casualties in 2019 were IEDs, air strikes, followed by ground engagements.¹⁵⁷⁸

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported total 1 650 incidents related to security in Helmand province: 1 154 battles, 474 remote violence, 22 cases of violence against civilians.¹⁵⁷⁹

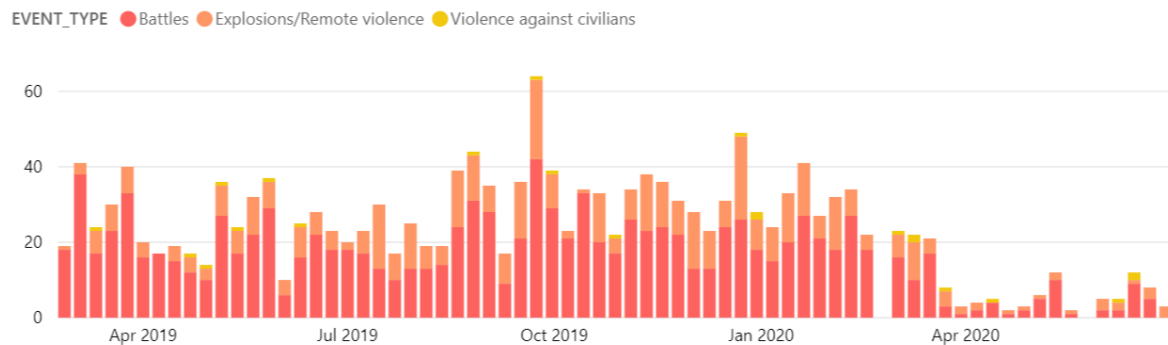


Figure 14. Helmand - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data¹⁵⁸⁰

During the reporting period, the use of IEDs caused the most civilian casualties in the province.¹⁵⁸¹ For instance, on 25 March 2020 at least eight civilians were killed after the explosion of a roadside bomb in Musa Qala district.¹⁵⁸² On 31 March 2020, eight other civilians were killed in an explosion in Nahr-e Saraj district.¹⁵⁸³ Although the Taliban claimed they usually issued a warning to local population about safety on the roads or closed the roads for traffic to reduce the number of civilians killed by IEDs, bombs on the roads still caused civilian casualties and limited the freedom of movement of local people.¹⁵⁸⁴

On 22 September 2019, Afghan special forces conducted a raid supported by US air strikes against prominent Al Qaida fighters.¹⁵⁸⁵ According to various sources, from 15¹⁵⁸⁶ to 40¹⁵⁸⁷ civilians were killed and at least 11 wounded when wedding procession was accidentally targeted. Most victims were women and children who participated in a wedding which was to take place in Musa Qala district.¹⁵⁸⁸ According to Ministry of Defense, during the same operation, the security forces managed to kill 22 foreign fighters, including persons from Al Qaeda leadership and arrest 14 others.¹⁵⁸⁹ On 29 June 2020,

¹⁵⁷⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹⁵⁷⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 69, 94

¹⁵⁷⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Ghazni; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

¹⁵⁸⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

¹⁵⁸¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹⁵⁸² Afghanistan Times, 8 killed in Helmand after vehicle hit by roadside bomb, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸³ SATP, Helmand Timeline 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁴ HRW, "You Have No Right to Complain" Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 53-55; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 42

¹⁵⁸⁵ PBS, 40 civilians killed in anti-Taliban raid in Afghanistan, 23 September 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 60; NYT, Ally of Al Qaeda Killed in Afghanistan Raid, Officials Say, but Taliban Deny It, 8 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 60

¹⁵⁸⁷ PBS, 40 civilians killed in anti-Taliban raid in Afghanistan, 23 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁸ PBS, 40 civilians killed in anti-Taliban raid in Afghanistan, 23 September 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 60; NYT, Ally of Al Qaeda Killed in Afghanistan Raid, Officials Say, but Taliban Deny It, 8 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸⁹ PBS, 40 civilians killed in anti-Taliban raid in Afghanistan, 23 September 2019, [url](#)

in Sangin district of Helmand province, ANA forces fired three mortars that landed in a busy marketplace, killing 19 civilians (including 6 children), and injuring 31 others (including 11 children).¹⁵⁹⁰

The second leading cause of casualties were air strikes.¹⁵⁹¹ Throughout 2019 and early 2020, US and Afghan forces continued operations in the province¹⁵⁹², including air strikes reportedly inflicting considerable damage among civilians.¹⁵⁹³ Although a peace agreement between US and Taliban was signed in February 2020, US and Afghan forces continued air strikes in Helmand province because Taliban continues attacking military checkpoints of Afghan security forces.¹⁵⁹⁴

Besides suicide and non-suicide IEDs attacks, AGEs targeted selected groups of civilians in Helmand. There were reports of cases of killing tribal elders, government employees and journalists in Lashkar Gah City during the reporting period.¹⁵⁹⁵ According to a Human Rights Watch report, any contact with the Afghan government for civilian population is prohibited in Taliban-controlled areas. For example, Taliban targeted a resident of Helmand whose relatives worked for the police and accused him of being 'a police spy'.¹⁵⁹⁶ Taliban also used civilian homes for military purposes and punished residents who tried to oppose.¹⁵⁹⁷ There were cases when Taliban tried to intimidate the workers of de-mining NGOs in Grishk (Nahr-e-Saraj) district.¹⁵⁹⁸

2.12.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 9233 persons displaced from Helmand province. 7 481 persons were displaced within the province itself from different localities mainly to Lashkargah and Washer district. 1 752 persons were displaced from Helmand to other provinces, mainly to Kandahar.¹⁵⁹⁹ A significant number of IDPs came from Marja / Nad-e Ali¹⁶⁰⁰ where the Afghan army conducted a military operation trying to recapture the district from Taliban.¹⁶⁰¹

In the reporting period 103 persons arrived to the Helmand's district Nahr-e Saraj from Daykundi province.¹⁶⁰²

¹⁵⁹⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 2020 Mid-year Update, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 15; Stars and Stripes, Afghan forces launched mortar attacks that killed civilians in Helmand, UN says, 30 June 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 23 Civilians Killed in Rocket Attacks in Helmand 29 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 69, 94

¹⁵⁹² Quilty A., Static War: Helmand after the US Marines' return, AAN, 23 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 60;

¹⁵⁹⁴ CNBC, US carries out first airstrike on Taliban since Doha deal, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Helmand; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#)); Khaama Press, Media staff killed in Afghanistan's southern province Helmand, 2 January 2020, [url](#); 1 TV, Afghan media worker killed in Afghanistan, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹⁶ HRW, "You Have No Right to Complain" Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-7

¹⁵⁹⁷ HRW, "You Have No Right to Complain" Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 53-54

¹⁵⁹⁸ HRW, "You Have No Right to Complain" Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), p. 44

¹⁵⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

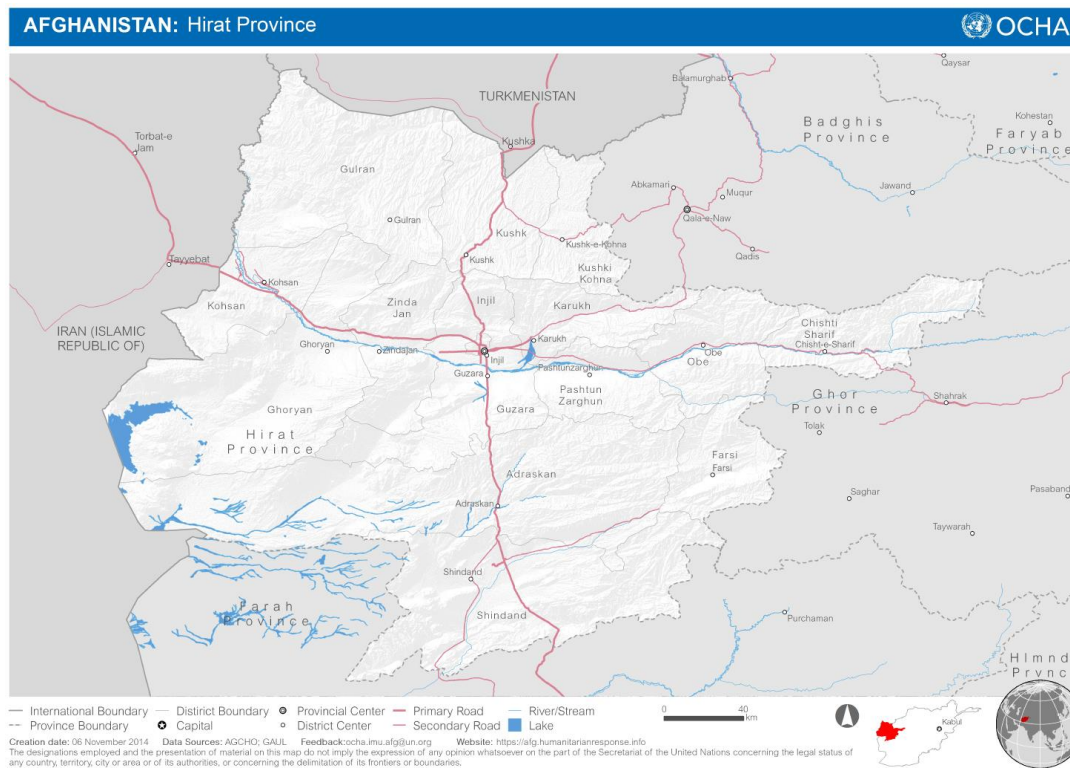
¹⁶⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰¹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Can Afghan Forces Hold On To Former Taliban Territories?, 23 July 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Helmand's Marjah Cleared of 'Insurgents' After Four Years, 1 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

2.13 Herat

2.13.1 General description of the province



Map 13: Afghanistan – Herat province, source: UNOCHA¹⁶⁰³

The province of Herat is located in the west of Afghanistan, sharing an international border with Iran to the west and Turkmenistan to the north, as well as with the provinces of Badghis to the north-east, Ghor to the east, and Farah to the south.¹⁶⁰⁴ Herat province is divided into the following administrative units: Adraskan, Chisti Sharif, Farsi, Ghoryan, Gulran, Guzara (Nizam-e Shahid), Herat, Injil, Karukh, Kohsan, Kushk (Rubat-e Sangi), Kushki Kohna, Obe, Pashtun Zarghun, Shindand, Zinda Jan. Additionally, there are four ‘temporary’ districts – Poshtko, Koh-e Zore (Koh-e Zawar), Zawol, and Zer Koh.¹⁶⁰⁵ The provincial capital of Herat is the city of Herat.¹⁶⁰⁶ According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Herat is one of the largest provinces of Afghanistan.¹⁶⁰⁷

Afghanistan NSIA estimated the population of Herat province at 2 140 662 in 2020-21, with 574 276 of its residents living in the provincial capital.¹⁶⁰⁸ According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazara, Turkmen, Uzbeks and Aimaqs are the main ethnic groups in the province, with Pashtuns representing the majority in 11 border districts.¹⁶⁰⁹ A 2015 USIP report stated that ‘historically, Herat City has been a Tajik-dominated enclave in a Pashtun-majority province that includes sizeable Hazara and Aimaq minorities.’¹⁶¹⁰ Large-scale migration reportedly changed the ethnic composition of the city.

¹⁶⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Herat Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Herat Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁵ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, n.d., [url](#), p. 42

¹⁶⁰⁶ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Herat, 2020, [url](#);

Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, n.d., [url](#), p. 42

¹⁶⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Herat province, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁰⁸ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, n.d., [url](#), pp. 5 and 42

¹⁶⁰⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Herat province, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁰ USIP, Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, 2015, [url](#), p.8

According to AAN, the share of Shia Hazaras has been particularly increasing since 2001 due to repatriation from Iran and displacement from provinces of central Afghanistan.¹⁶¹¹

The province is connected to other major cities by the Ring Road.¹⁶¹² A primary road leads from Herat eastwards to Ghor and Bamyan and on to Kabul.¹⁶¹³ Other highways connect the provincial capital with the Afghan-Turkmen border crossing at Torghundi, as well as with the Afghan-Iranian border crossing at Islam Qala.¹⁶¹⁴ According Railway Gazette, Herat will be connected to Iran through a railway, which was under construction during the reporting period.¹⁶¹⁵

Herat International airport is located about 10 kilometres west of Herat City, with a capacity of managing 350 000 passengers per year, and the airport is managed by NATO forces, under the Italian command.¹⁶¹⁶ While agriculture is an important source of income for many dwellers in rural parts of Herat, '[...] urban commercial and industrial ventures dominate Herat City's economy' and the proximity of Iran is a determining factor for the city.¹⁶¹⁷

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Herat was not one of the ten main opium-poppy cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018.¹⁶¹⁸ Compared to 2017, Herat's opium-poppy cultivation decreased by 46 % in 2018. The main opium-poppy cultivating districts in 2018 have been Kushk and Shindand.¹⁶¹⁹ According to AAN, in 2019, opium-poppy cultivation in the western provinces including in Herat has decreased by 23 % compared to 2018.¹⁶²⁰

2.13.2 Conflict background and actors in Herat

According to Khaama Press, 'Herat has been among the relatively calm provinces in the west of Afghanistan but the Taliban militants are active in some of its remote districts and often attempt to carry out terrorist related activities.'¹⁶²¹ In October 2018, AAN reported that 'large swathes of territory in the province, particularly areas far from the provincial and district centres, are either contested or partially or completely controlled by the Taliban.'¹⁶²² In December 2019, Etilaatroz reported on widespread presence of Taliban fighters in a number of districts of Herat province.¹⁶²³ In a separate article, Etilaatroz quoted Mehdi Hadid, a member of Herat provincial council, stating the Taliban have presence in Shindand, Kushki Kohna, Gulran, Rubat-e Sangi, Pashtun Zarghun, Adraskan and Farsi districts, and the group has established checkpoints on the Islam Qala Highway. Mehdi also indicated that the government controlled the capitals of all districts, within a limit of 5 kilometres from the district capitals. The source added that, Jilani Farhad, spokesperson for the governor of Herat province claimed that [informal translation] 'Taliban have presence in Gulran, Shindand and Kushki Kohna, but

¹⁶¹¹ Kazemi, R.S., Speculation Abounding: Trying to make sense of the attacks against Shias in Herat city, AAN, 3 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶¹² Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶¹³ iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁴ iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁵ Railway Gazette International, Herat province railway construction contract signed, 12 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁶ Technical, Herat International Airport (Afghanistan), 19 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁷ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Herat Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶¹⁸ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁶¹⁹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 33

¹⁶²⁰ AAN, New world drug report: opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶²¹ Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban leader killed in Herat drone strike, 17 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶²² Kazemi, R.S., The 2018 Election Observed (6) in Herat: Insecurity, organisational shambles, alleged rigging, AAN, 20 December 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶²³ Etilaatroz, *اعتراض شهروندان هرات؛ نمایندگان این ولایت خواستار برکناری فرمانده پولیس شدند* [informal translation 'Herat citizen protest; representatives of this province demanded the removal of the police chief'], 30 December 2019, [url](#)

the government holds its state sovereignty [over the province] and the security forces maintain security.¹⁶²⁴

According to information LWJ collected and presented in a map released on 6 July 2020, Gulran, Koshk, Kushki Kohna, Obe, Adraskan, Ghoryan and Shindand districts of Herat province were contested and Farsi district was ‘unconfirmable Taliban claim of control’.¹⁶²⁵ In January 2020, Stars and Stripes indicated the presence of Rasool group [Taliban’s separatist group] in Herat province that continued to fight the main Taliban groups in the province. The source claimed Rasool group ‘operated with the tacit support of the Afghan Government’.¹⁶²⁶

According to the UN Security Council report, the Taliban shadow governor for Herat was *Mawlawi Abdul Rashid* in May 2020.¹⁶²⁷ On 23 May 2020, Tolonews reported that NDS arrested a key Taliban commander and ‘a member of the Taliban’s leadership commission named Qari Shafi (also known as Hafiz Omeri) in Herat province at the border with Iran’.¹⁶²⁸

In terms of government presence, the 207th Zafar Corps is in charge of the ANA operations in the province of Herat.¹⁶²⁹ As part of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, Italian forces provide ‘functionality-based’ security assistance to ANA 207th Corps and ANP in Herat province.¹⁶³⁰

In December 2019, Gandhara news quoted the chief of Herat police stating there was a shortage in the number of police in Herat province and only in Herat City there was a need for 1 200 Afghan National Police (ANP) in order to tackle insecurity.¹⁶³¹ According to Pajhwok, residents of Herat City complained that there were not enough police personal in the city to provide security for the population.¹⁶³² According to Etilaatroz, on 30 August 2019, there was one police officer per 1 000 people in Herat province. The source cited Ghulam Hussain Majrohi, a military expert stating that due to insecurity in several districts of Herat province, there were no judiciary institutions, and people used Taliban courts to resolve their problems.¹⁶³³ In December 2019, Pajhwok reported that the chief of Police District 10 (PD 10) of Herat City has been removed from the office for the lack of efficiency to provide security in the city.¹⁶³⁴

¹⁶²⁴ Etilaatroz, *بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه* [informal translation: ‘security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban’s mobility to heavy losses of the group’], 30 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁵ LWJ, Several Districts Change Hands as Fighting Rages in Northern Afghanistan, 6 July 2020, [url](#), however the source does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated

¹⁶²⁶ Stripes, Airstrike in western Afghanistan kills leader of Taliban splinter group, may have killed civilians, 9 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁷ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁶²⁸ Tolonews, “Key” Taliban member arrested in Herat by NDS, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶²⁹ Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url](#); USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 59

¹⁶³⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁶³¹ Radio Azadi, *فرمانده پولیس هرات: اگر نیروهای پولیس افزایش نیابد اقتصاد هرات فلج می شود* [informal translation: ‘Herat Police commander: if the number of police personnel does not increase, economy of Herat will be impacted’], 17 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶³² Pajhwok Afghan News, Worsening insecurity worries Herat residents, 19 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶³³ Etilaatroz, *بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه* [informal translation: ‘security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban’s mobility to heavy losses of the group’], 30 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, *آمر حوزه دهم امنیتی پولیس هرات به دلیل غفلت وظيفوی برکنار شد* [informal translation: ‘chief of Police District 10 of Herat has been removed from office due to negligence’], 17 December 2019, [url](#)

2.13.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.13.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 400 civilian casualties, including 144 killed and 256 injured in Herat province, which represents 54 % increase compared to 2018. The leading causes of casualties were Non-Suicide IEDs, ground engagements and targeted/deliberate killings.¹⁶³⁵ According to SIGAR, RS (Resolute Support) recorded between 51 and 75 civilian casualties in Herat province during the first quarter of 2020¹⁶³⁶, and the mentioned source recorded between 101 and 125 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020.¹⁶³⁷

According to ACLED data, between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 there were 529 security incidents recorded in Herat province, of which 360 were coded as battles, 141 remote violence and 28 incidents of violence against civilians.

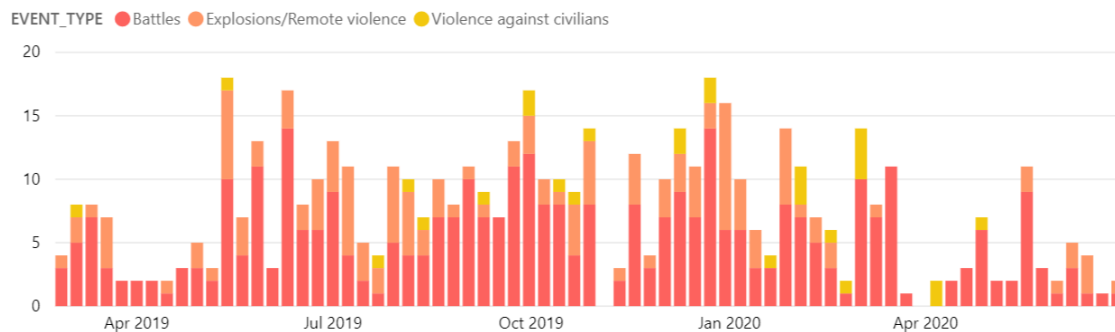


Figure 15. Herat - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data¹⁶³⁸

A local media source indicated that Herat district roads are not safe and residents complain about armed thieves who rob civilians' vehicles, particularly motorcycles, sometimes nearby the security checkpoints.¹⁶³⁹ There is reportedly rising insecurity on the Islam Qala-Herat Highway.¹⁶⁴⁰ On 30 March 2020, Herat special police reportedly seized in a raid in Kang village of Ghoryan district a truck loaded with four tons of explosives. The source quoted the Ministry of Interior (MoI) stating that 'militants wanted to use the material in making roadside bombs and explosives for suicide attacks.'¹⁶⁴¹

According AAN, 'in late 2019 and early 2020, Afghanistan's key western city of Herat witnessed a series of security incidents, including targeted killings and attacks on the police.'¹⁶⁴² On 12 February 2020, a local media in Herat province reported that the Taliban military commission issued a statement that called on its fighting commanders to stop using civilian houses, mosques and other public infrastructures as hideouts during the clashes with the security forces, or during air strikes. The source indicated that the mentioned Taliban statement has been disseminated in several districts of Herat province. The source also posted a copy of the original statement in Pashto language dated 3 February 2020.¹⁶⁴³

¹⁶³⁵ UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹⁶³⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

¹⁶³⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹⁶³⁸ Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Herat; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶³⁹ News Vim, *سریال بی پایان قتل و ترور ها در هرات* [informal translation 'endless serial killings and assassinations in Herat'], 2 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁰ Kabul Now, Customs staffs on strike over growing insecurity on Islam Qala-Herat highway, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴¹ 1 TV News, Afghan police finds four tons of explosives in truck in Herat, 30 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴² AAN, Herat City's reported spike in insecurity: what a sober of reading events reveals, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴³ News Vim, *رهبري نظامي طالبان استفاده از منازل مسكوني به عنوان مخفيگاه را منع كرد* [informal translation 'Taliban military leadership banned the usage of residential houses as hideouts'], 12 February 2020, [url](#)

Recent security incidents that caused civilian casualties in Herat province in 2019 and 2020 include: five civilians reportedly killed and 29 wounded on 6 August 2019, when a motorcycle laden with explosives detonated in the Haji Abbas area of Herat City¹⁶⁴⁴; on 28 August 2019, eight civilians and six pro-government militias were killed, and nine people including seven civilians and two pro-government militias were wounded in a Taliban attack in the Chahardarra village of Koshk-e Robatsangi district¹⁶⁴⁵; on 28 September 2019, one civilian was killed, and two others wounded in a Taliban attack on a polling centre in Obe district¹⁶⁴⁶; on 29 September 2019, two separate roadside bombs killed two civilians in Golran district¹⁶⁴⁷; 14 members of a pro-government militia were killed in Rubat-e Sangi district of Herat after several Taliban fighters stormed security checkpoints in the Chahardara area, wounding several civilians¹⁶⁴⁸; on 2 October 2019, two police officers and one civilian were killed in a Taliban attack on the centre of Farsi district¹⁶⁴⁹; in a separate incident, three civilians were killed including women, children, and a retired Afghan army officer when the Taliban attacked a civilian vehicle in the village of Barnobad in Ghoryan district¹⁶⁵⁰; on 17 October 2019, two civilians were killed, and three others were wounded when the Taliban attacked a vehicle, due to errant intelligence information, on the Kandahar-Herat Highway in the village of Kalesk in Zawol district¹⁶⁵¹; on 23 October 2019, one civilian was killed, and two others wounded by the explosion of a roadside bomb in the Buran village of Pashtun Zarghun district¹⁶⁵²; on 28 October 2019, a suicide attack near the Imam Hadi Mosque in the Darb-e Khosh area of Herat City, killed one civilian and injured six others¹⁶⁵³; on 7 November 2019, the Taliban killed one civilian in the Pal Pada village of Pashtun Zarghun district¹⁶⁵⁴; on 31 December 2019, one civilian was killed and another injured by a roadside bomb in Golran district¹⁶⁵⁵; on 7 January 2020, around 40 civilians were killed by a US drone attack in the centre of Shindand district after the strike targeted and killed a Taliban key member and nearly 30 of his men¹⁶⁵⁶; on 18 February 2020, five civilians were killed including two women and three children after foreign troops carried out an air strike targeting a Taliban commander, Mullah Ahmad Ahmadi, in Kushki Kohna district.¹⁶⁵⁷ According to AAN, different sources including oral ones reported different numbers of civilian casualties during the mentioned incident¹⁶⁵⁸; on 7 March 2020, seven civilians were killed and 17 others were wounded in Khwaja Noor village of Kushk Rubat-e Sangi district after Taliban fighters attacked the area and ‘opened fire on women and children’.¹⁶⁵⁹ According to the New York Times Taliban attacked a pro-government outpost in the mentioned area, and the group ‘kidnapped six civilians, including one teacher, all of whom were later killed’¹⁶⁶⁰; on 18 March 2020, one civilian was killed and another injured during a Taliban attack on a government outpost in Kal-e Sorkh village of Adraskan district¹⁶⁶¹; on 14 May 2020, one woman was killed and two other civilians were wounded when the Taliban opened fire on a security checkpoint in Sarak-e Naw village of Ghoryan district¹⁶⁶²; on 18 May 2020, one civilian was killed in Khwaja Nooh village of Shindand district after the Taliban

¹⁶⁴⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁸ Al Jazeera, Taliban kills 14 pro-government fighters in Afghanistan, 28 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁵ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁶ GARDAWORLD, Afghanistan: Drone strike leaves heavy casualties in Herat Province January 9, 9 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁷ AIHRC, *درباره تلفات غیرنظامی در ولایت های کنړ و هرات* [informal translation: ‘concerning civilian casualties in Kunduz and Herat provinces’], 20 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁸ AAN, Disputed casualties in Kushk: the cost of blurring lines between fighters and civilians, 24 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵⁹ Tolonews, Herat attack leaves seven civilians dead, including children, 7 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁰ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶¹ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶² NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

ambushed a military convoy¹⁶⁶³; on 12 June 2020, one civilian was killed and seven others were injured (including five teenagers) in a rocket attack by the Taliban in Golran-e Timory village in Golran district¹⁶⁶⁴; on 14 June 2020, one civilian was killed in the village of Band-e Benafsh in Obe district due to the clashes between the Taliban and ANSF¹⁶⁶⁵; on 20 June 2020, one civilian (shopkeeper) and four police officers were killed when a police vehicle hit a roadside bomb in Dahana village of Kohsan district¹⁶⁶⁶; on 1 July 2020, one civilian was killed, and nine security forces were injured including the police chief of Herat province, Obaidullah Noorzai, after the Taliban attacked ANSF convoy in Fooshkan village of Pashton Zarghun district.¹⁶⁶⁷

2.2.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 3 761 persons displaced from Herat province, with almost 99 % displaced within the province itself.¹⁶⁶⁸

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 9 398 persons displaced to Herat province, with 42 % coming from Badghis, 6 % from Ghor, 5 % from Farah, 4 % from Faryab, 3 % from Ghazni, Kunduz and Uruzgan, and the remaining 40 % coming from within the province itself.¹⁶⁶⁹

UNOCHA weekly Humanitarian update (1 to 7 June 2020) indicated that the security situation in west of Afghanistan remained unstable during the reporting period, and over 100 000 IDPs living in informal settlements in Herat province was going to receive humanitarian aid.¹⁶⁷⁰ According to Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR), more than 17 000 IDPs families were living in Herat province in February 2020¹⁶⁷¹, a much lower figure compared to the AAN/Nadim figure indicating that around 158 000 IDP families were living in Herat province during the reporting period including 70 000 IDP families in Herat City.¹⁶⁷²

¹⁶⁶³ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁴ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁵ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁶ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁷ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

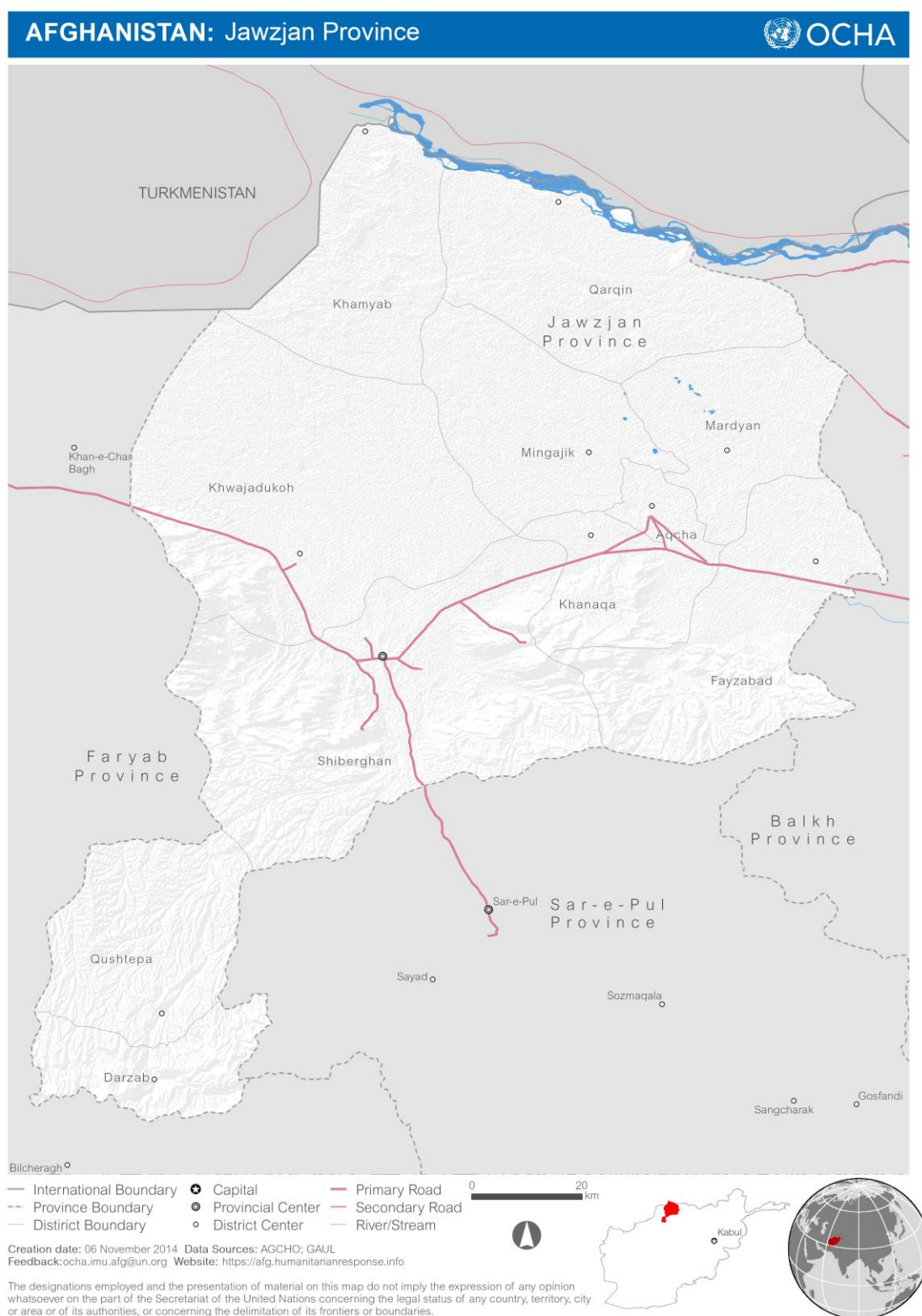
¹⁶⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 7 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁷¹ DACAAR, Remember the plight of drought IDPs in Herat, 4 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷² AAN, Herat City's reported spike in insecurity: what a sober of reading events reveals, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

2.14 Jawzjan

2.14.1 General description of the province



Map 14: Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, source: UNOCHA¹⁶⁷³

¹⁶⁷³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Jawzjan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

Jawzjan province is located in the north of Afghanistan and has borders with Balkh province to the east, Sar-e Pul to the south, and Faryab to the west and an international border with Turkmenistan to the north.¹⁶⁷⁴ Jawzjan province is divided into the following administrative units: Aqcha, Darzab, Fayzabad, Khamyab, Khanaqa, Khwajadukoh, Mardyan, Mingajik, Qarqin, Qushtepa and Shiberghan. The provincial capital is Shiberghan.¹⁶⁷⁵ According to AAN, Darzab has been transferred from Faryab to Jawzjan because of security reasons. Later, the district of Qushtepa was carved out of Darzab.¹⁶⁷⁶

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 602 082, 192 724 of whom live in the provincial capital, Shiberghan.¹⁶⁷⁷ The main ethnic groups in the province are Uzbek and Turkmen. Other groups present include Pashtuns and so-called Arabs – i.e. descendants of migrants who left the Arabian Peninsula in the 14th century –, as well as some Tajiks and Kuchi nomads, whose numbers vary depending on the season.¹⁶⁷⁸

The Ring Road connects the provincial capital of Jawzjan with the major population centre Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh, as well as Faryab to the west. Another main road connects neighbouring Sar-e Pul to the Ring Road in Shiberghan.¹⁶⁷⁹ Jawzjan was one of four provinces in Afghanistan where ANDSF particularly ‘dedicated significant resources to improving security along the major roads’ in the third quarter of 2019.¹⁶⁸⁰ According to UNOCHA, the road between Mazar-e Sharif and provincial capital Shiberghan remained contested in January 2020.¹⁶⁸¹ AGEs had control and were taxing commercial and logistic vehicles.¹⁶⁸²

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Jawzjan lost its poppy-free status in 2016. While opium-poppy cultivation reached a peak in 2017 – with a nearly eightfold increase compared to 2016 –, the size of the opium-poppy cultivating area in Jawzjan decreased by 90 % in 2018 compared to 2017.¹⁶⁸³ UNODC links the decrease in acreage to 2018’s severe draught in northern Afghanistan.¹⁶⁸⁴ Jawzjan was not among the ten main opium-poppy cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018.¹⁶⁸⁵

2.14.2 Conflict background and actors in Jawzjan

Despite being home to the former powerful Uzbek militia leader Abdul Rashid Dostum and the presence of his ‘former militia fighters’, insurgent activity reportedly increased in Jawzjan after NATO-led forces handed over control to Afghan security forces in 2012.¹⁶⁸⁶ A 2017 study on Islamic State (IS) presence in Afghanistan found that ‘there are enormous numbers of armed forces in [...] Jawzjan [...], among which the irregular (arbaki, private paramilitary units of commanders) and anti-government forces (mostly various local Taliban groups) clearly outnumber the ANSF (ANA, ANP and ALP) and National Uprising units.’¹⁶⁸⁷

¹⁶⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Northern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁵ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Jawzjan, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 38

¹⁶⁷⁶ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷⁷ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 38

¹⁶⁷⁸ Larsson, K., A Provincial Survey of Balkh, Jowzjan, Samangan and Saripul, November 2008, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁶⁷⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Northern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁰ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/990-S/2019/703, 3 September 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-6

¹⁶⁸¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 January – 26 January 2020), 29 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁶⁸⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 26

¹⁶⁸⁵ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17

¹⁶⁸⁶ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁷ Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 28-29

AAN reported in 2017 that the Taliban became increasingly successful in Jawzjan, setting up administrative and military institutions, after opening their ranks to non-Pashtun fighters. The recruitment of Uzbeks allegedly proved particularly successful in the province.¹⁶⁸⁸ Subsequently, the Taliban were able to expand their control in Jawzjan as well as in other provinces of northern Afghanistan.¹⁶⁸⁹ Within Jawzjan, they have been reportedly pushing into the province's northern and eastern parts, as well as the strategic areas around the provincial centre.¹⁶⁹⁰

AAN reported that conflict emerged between local Taliban commanders and the Taliban leadership in 2014 after the latter tried to enhance the accountability of the commanders in operations. According to AAN, the appearance of IMU in Qushtepa subsequently favoured the formation of an 'Islamic State (IS)' faction in the district.¹⁶⁹¹

IMU, which appeared to have started infiltrating Jawzjan in early 2015 from neighbouring Faryab province according to RFE/RL¹⁶⁹², has been a former ally of the Taliban, but shifted allegiance towards IS after the disclosure of Taliban leader Mullah Omar's death in 2015.¹⁶⁹³ The presence of IMU in Jawzjan reportedly provided Qari Hekmat and his followers with an opportunity to pledge allegiance to IS. Subsequently, Hekmat succeeded in shaping his former Taliban unit into an independent IS-associated group.¹⁶⁹⁴ AAN stated that it had found no reliable evidence of a connection between Hekmat's IS group and Nangarhar's Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), which is allegedly recognised by the 'Daesh central' in Syria and Iraq (i.e. the main franchise) as an IS branch.¹⁶⁹⁵ A study on IS presence in Afghanistan published in 2017 supported this finding.¹⁶⁹⁶

According to AAN, Hekmat's shift to 'IS' was rather driven by '[...] power-saving opportunism [...]' than by ideological motives.¹⁶⁹⁷ The self-proclaimed IS group managed to hold control over the districts of Qushtepa and Darzab for three years, fighting the Taliban¹⁶⁹⁸ – though not expanding its territory due to the widespread Taliban presence in the province¹⁶⁹⁹ – and initially outlasting the death of its founder by a US drone strike in April 2018.¹⁷⁰⁰ In August 2018, the Taliban overran the group's strongholds¹⁷⁰¹, prompting a faction of Hekmat's former unit to surrender to the government forces in fear of retaliation by the Taliban, while others (reportedly mainly Central Asian fighters) surrendered to the Taliban.¹⁷⁰² There were reports of an insider attack in Qushtepa district in June 2019, claiming that the attackers were former members of groups affiliated with ISKP, who had surrendered to the government in

¹⁶⁸⁸ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸⁹ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#); Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁰ Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island Overrun: Taleban defeat 'ISKP' in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹¹ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹² RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁹³ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#); AAN, Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, 24 November 2015, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁴ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁵ Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island Overrun: Taleban defeat 'ISKP' in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁶ Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 28-29

¹⁶⁹⁷ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁸ Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island: A Daesh enclave in Jawzjan?, AAN, 11 November 2018, [url](#); Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat's IS-affiliated 'island' survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018, [url](#); Der Spiegel, Afghanistan 120 Tote bei Kämpfen zwischen Taliban und IS [Afghanistan: 120 Dead in Clashes Between Taliban and IS], 19 July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹⁹ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁰ Ali, O., Still under the IS's Black Flag: Qari Hekmat's ISKP island in Jawzjan after his death by drone, AAN, 15 May 2018, [url](#); UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁷⁰¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 85

¹⁷⁰² Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island Overrun: Taleban defeat 'ISKP' in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, [url](#); UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 15

2018.¹⁷⁰³ No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Jawzjan province between 1 March 2019 and 20 June 2020.¹⁷⁰⁴

In August 2019 provincial police officials stated that 1 500 fighters, forming 123 groups, have been involved in fighting against government forces under the Taliban leadership in Jawzjan province.¹⁷⁰⁵ Darzab district was reported to be under Taliban control in March 2019.¹⁷⁰⁶ There were reports of the Taliban capturing Qushtepa district in July 2019¹⁷⁰⁷ and again during the presidential elections at the end of September 2019.¹⁷⁰⁸ Demanding more attention from the central government to Jawzjan's security in August 2019, the provincial police stated that next to Qushtepa, Khamyab district had also fallen to the Taliban while Mangajak, Qarqin, Muradyan and Darzab districts were under threat.¹⁷⁰⁹ In the months that followed media reports, adding Aqcha and Khanaqa districts, also reflected this threat on those districts.¹⁷¹⁰ The Taliban took control of Darzab district on 31 December 2019.¹⁷¹¹ The Afghan security forces reportedly withdrew peacefully from their Antan Hill military base on demand of the local residents.¹⁷¹² Although officials claimed that government forces had retaken Khamyab district in April 2020¹⁷¹³, in its assessment, consulted on 11 June 2020, LWJ continued to indicate the district as 'Taliban-controlled'.¹⁷¹⁴ As of 2 July 2020 the assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, additionally indicated Darzab and Qushtepa districts as 'Taliban-controlled', Mardyan, Mingajik and Shiberghan districts as 'government-controlled' and the remaining districts in Jawzjan province as 'contested'.¹⁷¹⁵

According to information at the disposal of the UN Security Council in 2019 and 2020, in Afghanistan Central Asian groups were under the direct operational and financial control of the Taliban.¹⁷¹⁶ The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan was said to have no more than 100 members and operates mainly in

¹⁷⁰³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 pro-govt militiamen killed in Jawzjan, Samangan, 26 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Jowzjan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, '123 groups fight government forces under Taliban leadership in Jawzjan', 3 August 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Jawzjan Security Needs More Attention: Official, 5 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁶ Tolonews, Over 3,700 Militants Killed In 88 Operations In North: Official, 19 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-July 4, 4 July 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture Jawzjan's Qush Tepa district, 2 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban release 54 security forces in Jawzjan, 9 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰⁸ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/990-S/2019/703, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 6; UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/582-S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁷⁰⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, '123 groups fight government forces under Taliban leadership in Jawzjan', 3 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷¹⁰ Tolonews, 11 Police Killed/Wounded In Balkh, Police Under Siege in Jawzjan, 1 October 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Darzab district residents seek arms for self-defense, 2 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Dostum Pledges Support to Afghan Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban torch 3 telecom antennas in Jawzjan, 1 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹¹ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/753-S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁷¹² Khaama Press, Taliban takes over Darzab district of northern Jawzjan province, 31 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷¹³ Khaama Press, 25 Taliban militants killed, 17 wounded in the operation 'Retake of Khamaab', 12 April 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Security forces purge Jawzjan's Khomaab district, kill 25 Taliban rebels, 12 April 2020, [url](#); 1TV, Afghan forces retake Jowzjan's Khumab district, kill 14 Taliban militants, 19 April 2020, [url](#); USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 2, 18

¹⁷¹⁴ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

¹⁷¹⁵ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

¹⁷¹⁶ UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 18; UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 21

Faryab and Jawzjan provinces where it maintained links to splinter groups such as Islamic Jihad Group and Khatiba Imama al-Bukhari.¹⁷¹⁷

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Jawzjan province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps. Jawzjan province is included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.¹⁷¹⁸

2.14.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.14.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 123 civilian casualties (29 deaths and 94 injured) in Jawzjan. This represents a decrease of 33 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by explosive remnants of war and non-suicide IEDs.¹⁷¹⁹ Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Jawzjan in the first half of 2020, reporting a decrease in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.¹⁷²⁰

ACLED collected data on 244 violent events in Jawzjan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 180 of which were coded as battles, 58 as explosions/remote violence and 6 as violence against civilians. While ACLED registered violent events in all of Jawzjan's districts, around one third of all violent incidents in Jawzjan between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 were registered in Fayzabad and Aqcha districts.¹⁷²¹

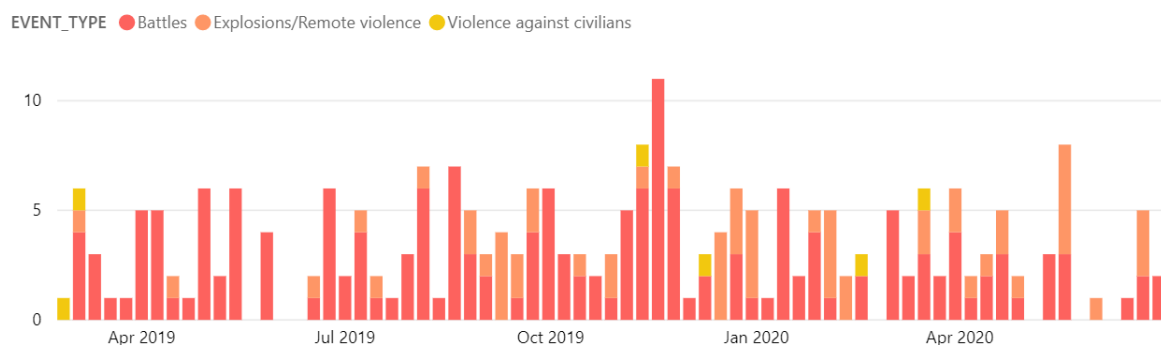


Figure 16. Jawzjan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data¹⁷²²

ACLED coded 74 % of the violent incidents in Jawzjan province as battles, mostly armed clashes, representing the most prevalent incident type in all of Jawzjan's districts.¹⁷²³ The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS

¹⁷¹⁷ UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁷¹⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12, p. 50; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁷¹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94. No UNAMA data on civilian casualties in Jawzjan province were available for the first half of 2020.

¹⁷²⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹⁷²¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Jowzjan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁷²² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Jowzjan, [url](#)

¹⁷²³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Jowzjan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

personnel¹⁷²⁴, and members of pro-government militias or local uprising forces¹⁷²⁵ or attacks on their facilities such as checkpoints¹⁷²⁶, headquarters¹⁷²⁷ and military bases¹⁷²⁸, and to a lesser extent on convoys and vehicles.¹⁷²⁹ At times these incidents resulted in civilian casualties, as for example in Khwajadukoh district where four civilians who were farming nearby were killed during a Taliban attack on a security post on 2 May 2019.¹⁷³⁰ In Qushtepa district two police officers and one civilian were killed and another civilian wounded when clashes broke out after a Taliban attack on a security post 30 May 2019.¹⁷³¹ Two civilians were injured in a Taliban attack on a village in Aqcha district in May 2020.¹⁷³²

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, such as in Fayzabad district in March 2019¹⁷³³ or in Qarqin district in July 2019¹⁷³⁴, were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.¹⁷³⁵

There were reports of groups of Taliban fighters attacking the centre of Mangajik district on 29 November 2019 and April 2020¹⁷³⁶, or Qarqin district on 30 May, 13 July and 10 August 2019 and 30 March 2020¹⁷³⁷ and Mardyan district at the end of March 2020.¹⁷³⁸ Some of these attacks resulted into hour-long clashes.¹⁷³⁹

Air/drone strikes represented 15 % of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Jawzjan between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.¹⁷⁴⁰ Most air strikes were carried out by Afghan forces, while a few

¹⁷²⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-July 4, 4 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, [url](#); Xinhua, 13 killed in N. Afghanistan clashes, including pro-gov't local leader, 4 February 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Gen. Dostum reacts to killing of uprising commander in Taliban militants ambush in Jawzjan, 7 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 5-11, 11 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#); Xinhua, At least 14 militants killed in separate incidents in Afghanistan, 8 April 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Jawzjan: 17 security personnel killed in Taliban assault, 30 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 policemen killed, 8 wounded in Jawzjan firefight, 28 January 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁷ Bakhtar News, Terrorists With Two Commanders Killed in Jawzjan Clash, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁸ Crisis Group, Crisiswatch November 2019, 12 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷²⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Jawzjan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁷³⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Over 180 killed in deadliest week of current year, 1 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷³² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³³ Xinhua, Over 40 including 3 civilians killed within one day in Afghan fighting, 4 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Up to 50 militants killed in Afghan Special Forces operations, airstrikes, 6 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁴ Khaama Press, Dadullah alias Surkhabi, one of the most dangerous leaders of Taliban killed in Jawzjan, 17 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Jawzjan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁷³⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Red Unit loses 7 men in Jawzjan firefight, 28 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷³⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 9-15, 15 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁰ These do not include air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under 'battles'. For more information on ACLED's methodology, please consult the introduction.

were attributed to NATO forces.¹⁷⁴¹ While air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs¹⁷⁴², in one reported incident on 20 May 2020, six civilians were also killed when Afghan forces bombed houses in response to a Taliban attack in Mardyan district.¹⁷⁴³

AGEs also used roadside bombs or IEDs, including VB-IEDs¹⁷⁴⁴, to target security forces, at times also causing casualties among civilians.¹⁷⁴⁵ This happened on 31 October 2019 when explosives transported by the Taliban, went off prematurely in Mardyan district.¹⁷⁴⁶ An employee of Afghan Gas Company was killed and five of his colleagues were wounded as a result of a roadside bomb hitting their vehicle in Shiberghan City in December 2019.¹⁷⁴⁷ One child was killed and two were wounded when a bomb exploded at an abandoned check point in Dazab district on 7 February 2020¹⁷⁴⁸ and one child was killed and two were wounded when two roadside bombs exploded in Mangajik district on 27 June 2020.¹⁷⁴⁹

Six incidents categorised by ACLED as ‘violence against civilians’ included the killing of a tribal elder by a pro-government militia in Aqcha district in February 2020¹⁷⁵⁰, arson in several shops and schools by AGEs in Darzab district in November 2019, injuring civilians¹⁷⁵¹, the killing of a child by the Taliban in Qushtepa district in March 2019¹⁷⁵², the killing of a fuel tanker driver who refused to stop at a Taliban check point on the Balkh-Jawzjan Highway in Shiberghan district in March 2019¹⁷⁵³ and the abduction of 40 elderly civilians from a funeral of a relative who belonged to a pro-government militia, in Fayzabad district by the Taliban in December 2019.¹⁷⁵⁴ The men were released after two days.¹⁷⁵⁵

There were reports from the northern region, which includes Jawzjan province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019.¹⁷⁵⁶ This happened for example in Fayzabad district when the Taliban torched an antenna of Salaam Telecom, which covered the Fayzabad district centre and surrounding areas up to 10 kilometres and was the only company providing 24 hours’ service in the area.¹⁷⁵⁷ Private mobile companies were warned to close down their networks until after the presidential election. By the end of September, early October 2019 all networks started functioning again.¹⁷⁵⁸ Attacks by the Taliban were reported on

¹⁷⁴¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Jowzjan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁷⁴² Pajhwok Afghan News, Commander among 18 Taliban killed in Jawzjan blitz, 5 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 9 Taliban militants killed in Helmand, Uruzgan and Jawzjan provinces, 5 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, At least 40 Taliban militants killed, wounded in Jawzjan airstrikes, 31 August 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 volleyball players killed in Kapisa ground blast, 14 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#); Salam Watandar, Air strike kills civilians in Jawzjan, 21 May 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁷⁴⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security personnel among 14 killed in Jawzjan incidents, 28 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Jowzjan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban’s IED expert blown up by own bomb in Jawzjan province, 29 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁶ Khaama Press, 31 Taliban militants, civilians killed, wounded as explosives-laden vehicle goes off in Jawzjan, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁰ Voice of Jihad, Tribal elder martyred, another one injured in enemy aggression, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵¹ 1TV, Civilians injured after militants torch schools, shops in Jowzjan: official, 16 November 2019, [url](#); Bakhtar News, Taliban Sustained Casualties in Jawzjan Operation, 17 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 1-7, 7 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 8-year-old child shot dead by Taliban militants in Jawzjan province, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 1-7, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban abduct 40 elderly men from Jawzjan funeral, 10 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban set free 40 elderly individuals in Jawzjan, 12 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁶ UNOCHA, 18 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban torch Salaam Telecom tower in Jawzjan, 7 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, [url](#)

presidential election day, 28 September 2019, in Fayzabad district. A woman was injured as a result of one of those incidents.¹⁷⁵⁹

In August 2019, increased insecurity was reported along the highway between Mazar-e Sharif and Shiberghan.¹⁷⁶⁰ Security incidents along the Balkh-Jawzjan Highway occurred in October 2019¹⁷⁶¹ and in February 2020¹⁷⁶² and also on the highway connecting Sar-e Pul to Jawzjan in March and August 2019 and in February, March and June 2020.¹⁷⁶³

During clashes leading up to the capture of Qushtepa district in July 2019, connection between the district and the provincial capital was cut off.¹⁷⁶⁴ Within the framework of its attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) did not register such attacks in Jawzjan province in 2019.¹⁷⁶⁵ However UNAMA documented a Taliban attack on the district hospital in Aqcha district on 28 October 2019. The Taliban occupied the hospital and used it for military purposes until ANDSF regained control. As a result of the attack two civilians were killed and two were injured.¹⁷⁶⁶ Upon taking control of Darzab district at the end of December 2019 the Taliban set fire to three different telecom towers in Darzab. Local residents reportedly were able to prevent the Taliban from destroying the local public hospital.¹⁷⁶⁷

2.14.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 4 186 persons displaced due to conflict from Jawzjan province, 67 % of whom were displaced within the province itself, while others sought refuge in Sar-e Pul, Balkh, Kandahar and Kabul provinces. Most IDPs were registered from Darzab district, followed by Aqcha, Khanaqa and Mingajik districts.¹⁷⁶⁸ UNOCHA reported how fighting caused displacement in Jawzjan in May 2020, in particular from Mingajik districts as a result of armed clashes between AGEs and the ANDSF.¹⁷⁶⁹ No conflict-induced displacement was registered by UNOCHA from Shiberghan during the reporting period.¹⁷⁷⁰

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 6 384 persons displaced to Jawzjan province. In addition to the 2 821 people displaced within the province, Jawzjan hosted a large group of IDPs from Faryab province, all displaced to Shiberghan. Shiberghan, Aqcha and Qarqin were the districts hosting people displaced to Jawzjan province in the reporting period, with Shiberghan district hosting 80 %.¹⁷⁷¹

¹⁷⁵⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 - 11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Security In Balkh Highway Concerning: Residents, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (17 February – 23 February 2020), 26 February 2020, [url](#);

UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (24 February – 1 March 2020), 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Security In Balkh Highway Concerning: Residents, 10 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 8-14, 14 March 2019, [url](#); Xinhua, 13 killed in N. Afghanistan clashes, including pro-gov't local leader, 4 February 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 uprising members killed in Jawzjan clashes, 3 March 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban militants suffer heavy casualties in Jawzjan province, 30 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 Taliban, 6 security forces perish in Jawzjan battle, 1 July 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture Jawzjan's Qush Tepa district, 2 June 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Qush Tepa District In Jawzjan Falls To Taliban: Sources, 2 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁵ WHO, Afghanistan. Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁷⁶⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban torch 3 telecom antennas in Jawzjan, 1 January 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban destroys telecom towers following occupancy of a district in northern Jawzjan province, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 May – 24 May 2020), 28 May 2020, [url](#)

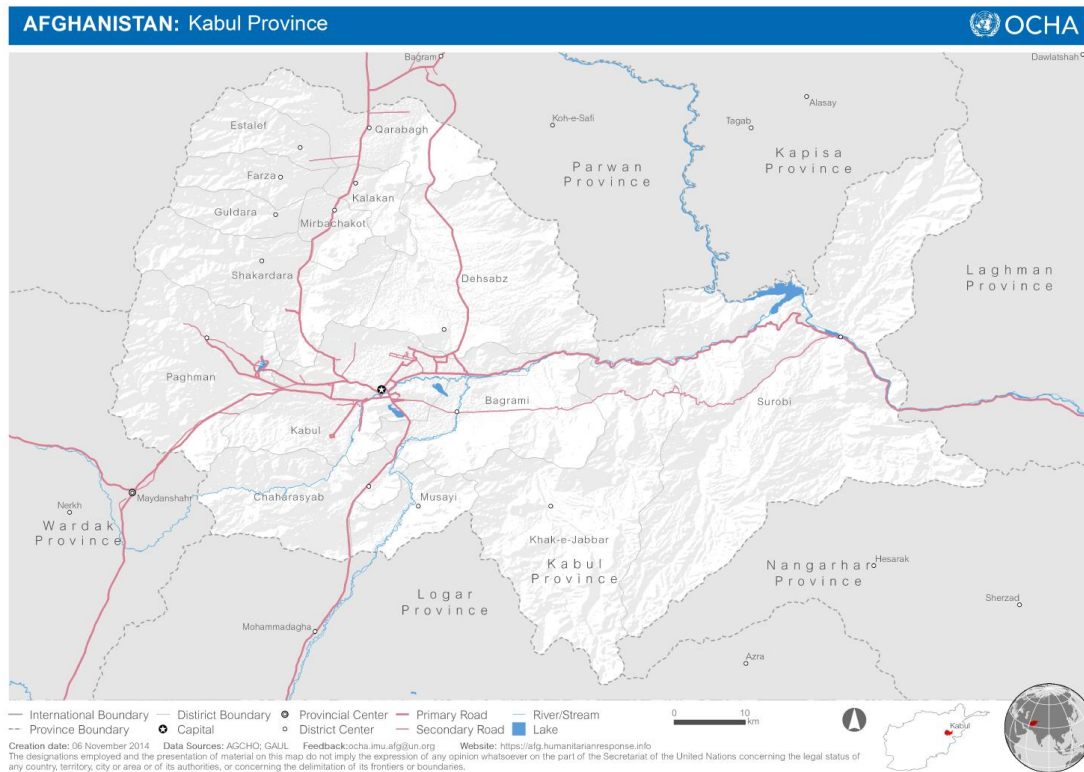
¹⁷⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 May – 31 May 2020), 3 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 May – 24 May 2020), 28 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12

2.15 Kabul province

2.15.1 General description of the province



Map 15: Afghanistan – Kabul province, source: UNOCHA¹⁷⁷²

Kabul province is located in the central region of Afghanistan and has borders with the provinces of Parwan and Kapisa to the north, Laghman to the east, Nangarhar to the south-east, Logar to the south and Wardak to the west.¹⁷⁷³ More than half of the province consists of mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain.¹⁷⁷⁴ Kabul province is divided into the following administrative units: Bagrami, Chaharasyab, Dehsabz, Estalef, Farza, Guldara, Kabul, Kalakan, Khak-e Jabbar, Mirbachakot, Musayi, Paghman, Qarabagh, Shakardara and Surobi. The provincial capital is Kabul City, the capital of Afghanistan.¹⁷⁷⁵ North of Kabul City lies the Shomali plain, a plateau stretching from the outskirts of the city to the Salang Pass. According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, the Shomali area has been a central part of Afghan economy and politics in the last couple of centuries -featuring strong political-armed networks dating back to the *mujahideen* time.¹⁷⁷⁶

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Kabul province has a population of 5 204 667.¹⁷⁷⁷ Kabul province has the largest share of population of any province, an estimated 16 % of the national total.

July 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (2 December – 8 December 2019), 11 December 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 December – 22 December 2019), 26 December 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 December – 22 December 2019), 19 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Kabul Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Kabul Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁴ WFP, Provincial Profile: Kabul, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁵ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Kabul, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁷⁷⁶ Foschini, F., Elections 2014 (6): Two Types of Security in the Shomali, AAN, 7 April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁷ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

AAN describes Kabul province as the most ethnically diverse of all provinces.¹⁷⁷⁸ The main ethnic groups in Kabul are Tajik, Pashtun and Hazara.¹⁷⁷⁹ Other groups present include Uzbek, Turkmen and Baloch. The majority of the population of Kabul province are Sunni Muslim, but there are also Shia, Sikh and Hindu.¹⁷⁸⁰

Major roads depart from Kabul City and connect the Afghan capital with the rest of the country. The main highway to Mazar-e Sharif passes through the districts of Shakardara, Mirbachakot, Kalakan and Qarabagh. Another primary road connects Kabul City with Bagram in Parwan province and passes through Dehsabz and Qarabagh districts. The Kabul-Jalalabad Highway leads to Nangarhar province through the districts of Bagrami, Khak-e Jabbar and Surobi. The Kabul-Kandahar Highway connects Kabul to Wardak province through Paghman district in the south-west of the province. Another primary road passes through Bagrami and Chaharasyab districts in the south and connects Kabul City with Logar province.¹⁷⁸¹ Kabul City hosts an airport served by international and domestic scheduled passenger flights.¹⁷⁸²

UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52 % reduction in opium poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region (including Kabul province) and the central highlands.¹⁷⁸³ According to UNODC's Opium Survey from 2018, opium-poppy cultivation in Kabul province was limited to the Uzbin Valley of Surobi district.¹⁷⁸⁴ Surobi district is additionally mentioned as home to the ephedra sinica plant, which contains the natural stimulant ephedrine, used to make the drug methamphetamine and expected to take up a central role in Afghanistan's drug economy soon.¹⁷⁸⁵ According to the July 2019 Quarterly Update from SIGAR, the provinces of Kabul and Nangarhar recorded most cases related to drug smuggling and trafficking.¹⁷⁸⁶ Also in July 2019, UNODC reported that 20 % of the drug trafficking cases recorded in 2018-2019 were attempts to smuggle drugs out of Afghanistan through Kabul airport.¹⁷⁸⁷ In February 2020, the Kabul counter-narcotics police chief was arrested for extortion, distributing drugs¹⁷⁸⁸ and collusion with drug smugglers.¹⁷⁸⁹

2.15.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul

In May 2020, the UN Security Council reported on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made in Kabul province.¹⁷⁹⁰ An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated all Kabul's districts as 'government-

¹⁷⁷⁸ Warden, S., Past as Prologue? What the Parliamentary Election Results Tell Us About the September Presidential Election, AAN, 23 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷⁹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Kabul Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁸¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Kabul Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸² Hamid Karzai International Airport [website], n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁸³ Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁷⁸⁵ Undark, The Wild Shrub at the Root of the Afghan Meth Epidemic, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2019, [url](#), pp. 171-172

¹⁷⁸⁷ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018: Challenges to Sustainable Development, Peace and Security, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 36

¹⁷⁸⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 121

¹⁷⁸⁹ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/74/753-S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁷⁹⁰ UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9

controlled’ or ‘undetermined’.¹⁷⁹¹ As confirmed by USDOD and SIGAR, the capital, Kabul City, has remained under the control of the Afghan government.¹⁷⁹²

According to UNOCHA, the situation in Surobi district, in the eastern part of the province, has become increasingly volatile due to a rising number of militant attacks on ANDSF positions.¹⁷⁹³ The district has a significant strategic relevance because of its proximity to Kabul City and the Salang Highway.¹⁷⁹⁴ As reported by AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini in 2015, the government’s control over the Uzbin Valley in Surobi district had decreased and members of Hezb-e Islami, which has historically been the stronger group in the area, as well as the Taliban, have been reported present in the district. The Uzbin Valley has been serving as a relatively easily traversable connection to the insecure districts of Tagab in Kapisa province and Bad Pakh in Laghman province. According to Foschini, this broader region is ‘an important crossing point and sanctuary for insurgents moving deeper into Afghanistan from the border area [with Pakistan]’.¹⁷⁹⁵

Media sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in Surobi district, as well as on the arrest and killing of several prominent figures of the militant group in the area.¹⁷⁹⁶ In March 2019, two Taliban militants, reportedly planning a suicide attack in the district, were arrested during an NDS operation.¹⁷⁹⁷ In an ANDSF operation with US air support in the same month, the Taliban shadow district governor for Surobi was reportedly probably killed, as well as a key Taliban commander known as Mullah Rasheed.¹⁷⁹⁸ In May 2020, a Taliban commander known as Mullah Jan was injured, when a mortar, he was reportedly attempting to launch on a security forces’ base in the Uzbin Valley, went off prematurely.¹⁷⁹⁹

According to UNAMA, Surobi district has in recent years witnessed several community conflicts. In 2018, for example, ‘a mediation process [...] helped two tribes resolve a longstanding land dispute that had turned violent’. According to the Surobi local council head, ‘the major causes of conflict in the district are underdevelopment and poverty’.¹⁸⁰⁰

In July 2020, a rising Taliban presence and activity in several villages of the Arghandi area in Paghman district was reported. According to local residents, well-armed Taliban militants were launching attacks on security checkpoints, planting IEDs and extorting people. NDS officials, cited by Tolonews, confirmed two prominent Taliban commanders were operating in the area between Arghandi and the Kohna Kumar valley in Wardak province.¹⁸⁰¹

ISKP is reported as active and capable of carrying out attacks in Kabul¹⁸⁰², as well as to have caused civilian casualties in the province in 2019.¹⁸⁰³ However, due to continued ANDSF pressure to disrupt its

¹⁷⁹¹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#) (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)

¹⁷⁹² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2019, 12 July 2019, [url](#), p. 18; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 16; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 66

¹⁷⁹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January - 2 February 2020), 3 February 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁹⁴ War on the Rocks, Remembering the French War in Afghanistan, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁵ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing Some of Afghanistan’s Most Notorious Hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁶ See sources mentioned below.

¹⁷⁹⁷ Khaama Press, Suicide Bomber and His Companion Arrested in Kabul: NDS, 10 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁸ Tolonews, Five Civilians Killed in Afghan Forces Operation in Surobi, 26 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹⁹ Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Loses Both Legs in Premature Mortar Round Explosion in Kabul, 4 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁰ UNAMA, Kabul Elders Call for Participation of Afghans in Peacefully Resolving Community Conflict, 15 November 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰¹ Tolonews, Residents West of Kabul City Report Rise in Taliban Activity, 15 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰² USDOD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom’s Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 July - 30 September 2019, 20 November 2019, [url](#), p. 18; UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁸⁰³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 36

activities¹⁸⁰⁴, the militant group exhibited a reduced capacity to carry out high-profile attacks in Kabul in 2019.¹⁸⁰⁵ While ISKP represents a diminished threat since receiving a significant setback in late 2019 in what had been its Afghan headquarters in Nangarhar province, several sources indicate the group has not been eradicated entirely and has shown notable resilience in the past. Grounds for concern are added that several ISKP groups might have relocated to Kunar and Kabul provinces, raising the potential for a resurgence¹⁸⁰⁶, although reviving the groups networks would probably need time.¹⁸⁰⁷ Between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, ACLED recorded one incident specifically attributed to ISKP in Kabul province, outside of Kabul district (for information on the presence of ISKP in Kabul City, recruitment and incidents attributed to the group in the capital region, see the chapter on Kabul City).¹⁸⁰⁸ In February 2020, ISKP reportedly fired missiles on a US military base in Bagrami district, no casualties were recorded.¹⁸⁰⁹ In the same district in August 2019, two ISKP militants were reportedly killed in an ANDSF operation.¹⁸¹⁰ Additionally, ACLED recorded two incidents in which Taliban and/or ISKP militants were wounded and/or killed during military operations in Surobi district in July 2019 and in Paghman district in November 2019.¹⁸¹¹ In May 2020, various ISKP and Haqqani Network hideouts in the capital (see chapter on Kabul City) as well as in Shakardara district were raided during an operation by NDS special units. Several members of the militant groups, including a regional ISKP leader¹⁸¹², were reportedly arrested and killed.¹⁸¹³

In terms of the presence of government security forces, the main part of Kabul province falls under the responsibility of the Train, Advise and Assist Command - Capital (TAAC-C), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-C is currently led by Turkish forces together with contingents from other nations. The district of Surobi falls under the responsibility of the 201st ANA corps.¹⁸¹⁴ According to USDOD, about 10 % of US' and Afghan Forces' operations in 2019 focused on the Kabul region, preventing high-profile attacks.¹⁸¹⁵ The Special Mission Wing (SMW), an ANDSF unit established in 2012, has several assault squadrons in Kabul to conduct counterterrorism and

¹⁸⁰⁴ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 17; UNSC, Tenth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of UN Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat, 4 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7

¹⁸⁰⁵ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 25; Washington Post (The), Afghanistan Claims the Islamic State Was 'Obliterated'. But Fighters Who Got Away Could Stage a Resurgence, 9 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁸⁰⁶ NYT, ISIS Is Losing Afghan Territory. That Means Little for Its Victims, 2 December 2019, [url](#); International source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 21-22; UNSC, Tenth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of UN Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat, 4 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7; Washington Post (The), Afghanistan Claims the Islamic State Was 'Obliterated'. But Fighters Who Got Away Could Stage a Resurgence, 9 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 37

¹⁸⁰⁷ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the Recent Victory Against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁸⁰⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁰ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Raid Militants Hideouts in Kabul, 7 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸¹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁸¹² RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Capture Key Figures From Islamic State's South Asia Branch, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸¹³ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Raid Daesh Hideout North of Kabul, 6 May 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, 5 killed As Special Forces Bust Major Network Led by ISIS, Haqqani Network in Kabul, 6 May 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Capture Key Figures From Islamic State's South Asia Branch, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁸¹⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2019, 12 July 2019, [url](#), p. 6; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), p. 7

counternarcotic missions.¹⁸¹⁶ NDS unit 01, a paramilitary CIA-backed militia accused of human rights abuses, is reported to operate in the central region, including in Kabul province.¹⁸¹⁷

2.15.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.15.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 1 563 civilian casualties (261 deaths and 1 302 injured) in Kabul province. This represents a decrease of 16 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were suicide IEDs, followed by non-suicide IEDs and targeted/deliberate killings.¹⁸¹⁸ Compared to 2018, UNAMA listed Kabul as the second province with the largest increase in civilian casualties (+130) from ground engagements in 2019.¹⁸¹⁹ According to UNAMA, civilians living in Kabul province were most directly impacted by the conflict in 2019¹⁸²⁰, as well as in the first half of 2020 (together with Balkh province) with 338 civilian casualties recorded from 1 January to 30 June 2020.¹⁸²¹ According to Resolute Support, Kabul province suffered the highest countrywide number of civilian casualties (208) in the first quarter of 2020, representing the most substantial countrywide increase (151 %) compared to the last quarter of 2019.¹⁸²² In the second quarter of 2020, Resolute Support indicated Kabul as one out of three provinces, together with Nangarhar and Ghazni, that experienced the highest number of civilian casualties countrywide, with an average of 204 civilian casualties each, among the three provinces.¹⁸²³

ACLED collected data on 339 violent events in Kabul province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 172 were coded as ‘battles’, 132 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 35 as ‘violence against civilians’. Kabul district, where the capital Kabul City is located (see chapter on Kabul City), stood out as the district where most incidents were reported, with 142 incidents recorded - followed by Surobi, Mussahi, Paghman, Qarabagh and Dehsabz districts. In each of the rest of Kabul’s districts, less than 15 incidents were reported. Most violent incidents in Kabul province were recorded in the third quarter of 2019.¹⁸²⁴ Kabul witnessed the highest reported number of security incidents on record in July 2019.¹⁸²⁵

¹⁸¹⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 122; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 75

¹⁸¹⁷ Clark, K., CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitaries Accused of Grave Abuses: New Human Rights Watch Report, AAN, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸¹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹⁸¹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 119

¹⁸²⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2019, April 2019, [url](#), p. 2; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2019, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 3; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Third Quarter Report: 1 January to 30 September 2019, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 1-2

¹⁸²¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2020: 1 January - 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁸²² SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 69-70

¹⁸²³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 71-72

¹⁸²⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁸²⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (29 July - 04 August 2019), 4 August 2019, [url](#), p. 2

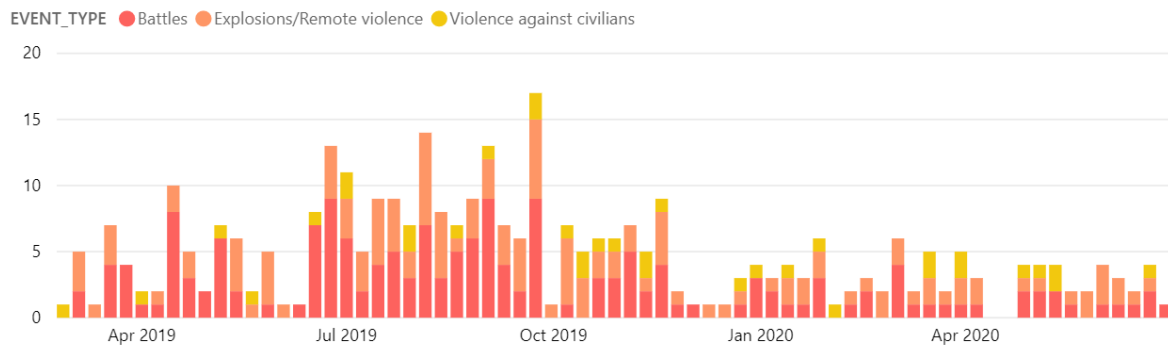


Figure 17. Kabul - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data¹⁸²⁶

ACLED coded around 51 % of the violent incidents in Kabul province as ‘battles’, all ‘armed clashes’. This category represented the most prevalent incident type in the majority of Kabul’s districts -with the exception of Kabul, Dehsabz and Chaharasyab districts, where most or an equal number of incidents were registered under the category of ‘explosions/remote violence’. The majority of the armed clashes in Kabul province were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police and NDS personnel as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis* (the term *arbaki* is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias).¹⁸²⁷ Examples of such incidents included attacks on military or police checkpoints/bases, such as a Taliban assault on security outposts in Shakardara district in June 2019¹⁸²⁸ and in July 2020¹⁸²⁹, as well as Taliban attacks on police checkpoints in Paghman district in May 2020¹⁸³⁰ and in Guldara district in June 2020¹⁸³¹, resulting in several casualties among ANDSF forces; as well as ambushes on security convoys/vehicles, such as a Taliban attack on an Afghan military convoy in the Tangi area of Surobi district in February 2020, resulting in several soldiers being killed and/or wounded.¹⁸³² No civilian casualties were reported in these incidents.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs and criminal groups were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.¹⁸³³ For example in March 2019, an ANDSF operation with US air support in Surobi district resulted in the killing of several Taliban militants as well as five civilians.¹⁸³⁴ In May 2020, a criminal gang leader was killed by police forces in the Cheh Dukhtaran area of Chaharasyab district.¹⁸³⁵ Also in May 2020, several ISKP militants were killed and arrested in ANP

¹⁸²⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁸²⁸ Ariana News, Insurgents Attack Police Checkpoint in Kabul District, 11 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸²⁹ Tolonews, Insurgents Attack Security Checkpoints in Kabul, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: Attacks on Healthcare during the Covid-19 Pandemic, June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁸³¹ Tolonews, 15 Soldiers Killed in Past Day Despite Unofficial Truce, 6 June 2020, [url](#); AP, Separate Attacks Kill 14 Afghan Forces in Kabul, Northeast, 6 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸³² Afghanistan, Liveuamap, Taliban: Enemy Convoy Engaged on Kabul-Jalalabad Highway in Tangi Area of Sarubi District Kabul on Sun. Resulting in 2 Pickup Trucks Destroyed & 5 Gunmen Killed/Wounded, 3 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸³³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁸³⁴ Tolonews, Five Civilians Killed in Afghan Forces Operation in Surobi, 26 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban Commanders among 6 Killed, Wounded in Surobi District of Kabul: Silab Corps, 27 March 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2019, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁸³⁵ Khaama Press, Gang Leader Killed During a Clash With the Police Forces in Kabul, 18 May 2020, [url](#)

and NDS operations in Shakardara district (see above).¹⁸³⁶ In June 2020, two prominent Taliban members were reportedly arrested during an operation in Qarabagh district.¹⁸³⁷

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented 28 % of all reported security incidents in Kabul province. The majority of these IED incidents were recorded in Kabul district (see chapter on Kabul City).¹⁸³⁸ In August 2019, a girls' school was destroyed in a Taliban-claimed explosion in Shakardara district.¹⁸³⁹ Some of the IED incidents in Kabul province resulted in casualties among civilians. This happened for example in June 2020, when a roadside bomb detonated in Qarabagh district¹⁸⁴⁰ and in Paghman district, killing several family members of writer and analyst Assadullah Walwalji.¹⁸⁴¹

ACLED coded 5 % of all violent events in Kabul province as 'suicide bombs'. Nearly all these events were reported in Kabul district (see chapter on Kabul City).¹⁸⁴² According to UNAMA, Kabul remained the province suffering the highest number of suicide attacks in 2019, with 15 suicide attacks in the capital region (see chapter on Kabul City) out of a nationwide total of 26.¹⁸⁴³ Two suicide bomb attacks were reported in Chaharasyab district: a Taliban suicide bomber targeted an Afghan special forces base in September 2019, killing several soldiers¹⁸⁴⁴; and an unidentified suicide bomber detonated his explosives near an ANDSF special operations facility in the Reshkor area in April 2020, causing several civilian casualties.¹⁸⁴⁵

Six air/drone strikes were recorded in Kabul province by ACLED, all carried out in Mussahi and Paghman districts in the third and fourth quarters of 2019. All but one of these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces, one was attributed to NATO forces, reportedly killing two civilians.¹⁸⁴⁶

ACLED categorised 10 % of all reported violent incidents in Kabul as 'violence against civilians'.¹⁸⁴⁷ These incidents involved for example: the killing of a government employee by a militant of the Haqqani Network in Tarakhel village of Dehsabz district in August 2019¹⁸⁴⁸; the killing of a Ministry of Finance employee by unidentified gunmen in Paghman district in October 2019¹⁸⁴⁹; the shooting of two prosecutors on their way to Parwan province in Qarabagh district in November 2019¹⁸⁵⁰; the shooting of several members of President Ashraf Ghani's personal security team while off-duty by

¹⁸³⁶ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Raid Daesh Hideout North of Kabul, 6 May 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, 5 killed as Special Forces Bust Major Network Led by ISIS, Haqqani Network in Kabul, 6 May 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Capture Key Figures From Islamic State's South Asia Branch, 11 May 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 'Key' Daesh Leaders Arrested in Kabul: NDS, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Key Taliban Figures Arrested in Kabul's Qarah Bagh, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸³⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁸³⁹ Bakhtar News, Taliban Torched Girls' School Building in N. Kabul, 21 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁰ Khaama Press, Explosion Leaves 4 Dead, Wounded in Kabul, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴¹ Tolonews, Afghan Writer Walwalji Loses 4 Family Members in IED Blast, 20 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁸⁴³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 39

¹⁸⁴⁴ Al Jazeera, Taliban Suicide Attack in Kabul Kills Afghan Troops, 12 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁵ RFE/RL, Afghanistan Suicide Bombing Kills at least Three, Wounds 15, 29 April 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Bombing near Afghan Capital Kills Three amid Unabated Violence, 29 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁸ Khaama Press, Haqqani Terrorist Network's Target Killer Arrested in Kabul, 26 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ministry Official Gunned Down in Kabul, 17 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019 (updated 2 December 2019), [url](#)

unknown gunmen in Paghman district in April 2020¹⁸⁵¹; the killing of the Supreme Court's administrative chief by unidentified gunmen in Surobi district in May 2020¹⁸⁵²; the shooting of two prosecutors and three other employees of the office of the Attorney General in Dehsabz district in June 2020¹⁸⁵³; and the killing of the head of the biometrics department of the Ministry of Interior by unknown gunmen in Chaharasyab district in July 2020.¹⁸⁵⁴

In August 2019, UNOCHA reported on Kabul as the province where most attacks on health facilities and medical personnel were recorded.¹⁸⁵⁵

Although Kabul stood out for having the largest number of both registered voters and recorded votes for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019, the province's voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters reached only around 20 %, remaining just below the national average.¹⁸⁵⁶ In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 51-75 % of respondents in Kabul province reported to have experienced fear while voting.¹⁸⁵⁷ Without providing further details, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on election related attacks on polling day in Kabul province.¹⁸⁵⁸ A hand grenade was reportedly detonated near a polling centre in a school in Shakardara district, causing no casualties. The Khalazai polling centre in Qarabagh district reportedly came under Taliban fire in the morning of election day and remained closed for several hours.¹⁸⁵⁹ Additionally 'dozens of bombs' were reported discovered and defused by the Afghan authorities in Kabul's districts of Qarabagh, Musahi, Khak-e Jabbar and Shakardara.¹⁸⁶⁰

In recent years, many of the security incidents outside of Kabul City have taken place along Afghanistan's main highways and transit routes, with AGEs regularly attacking Afghan security forces' outposts and civilians often being caught in the crossfire.¹⁸⁶¹ About 85 % of respondents of the Asia Foundation's 2019 Survey of the Afghan People in Kabul province reported to experience fear while travelling.¹⁸⁶² In July 2020, a surge in security threats on the main highways connecting Kabul with neighbouring provinces was reported.¹⁸⁶³ Several road security incidents and road blocks/closures were reported in 2019 and 2020.

In April 2019, the North-Kabul Highway to Baghlan was blocked in Pul-i Khumri by angry parliamentary election candidates and their supporters, resulting in several civilian casualties.¹⁸⁶⁴ In the beginning of 2020, road movements from Pul-i Khumri to Kabul were reportedly interrupted due to the presence of non-state armed groups.¹⁸⁶⁵ In January 2020, the Taliban attacked the security outpost of Khwaja Zaid on the Kabul-Baghlan Highway, causing several police casualties.¹⁸⁶⁶ The same highway was

¹⁸⁵¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020 (updated 30 April 2020), [url](#); RFE/RL, Gunmen Shoot Dead Afghan Presidential Guard on Kabul Outskirts, 4 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵² Pajhwok Afghan News, Supreme Court Official Gunned Down in Kabul, 3 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵³ AP, Gunmen Kill 5, Including 2 Prosecutors, in Afghan Capital, 22 June 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020 (updated 25 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁴ Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on 8 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Monthly Humanitarian Update (August 2019), 24 September 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁵⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 97-98

¹⁸⁵⁷ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 62

¹⁸⁵⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 Killed, 123 Wounded in Election Day Attacks, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵⁹ Ruttig, T. and Bjelica, J., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (11): A First Look at How E-Day Went, AAN, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁰ 1TV, [Twitter], posted on: 28 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶¹ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den Sentrale Regionen og i det Sentrale Hoylandet - oppdatering, 5 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/73/777-S/2019/193, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 14; USDOD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 April - 30 June 2019, 16 August 2019, [url](#), p. 35

¹⁸⁶² Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 63

¹⁸⁶³ Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 - 26 January 2020), 29 January 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁸⁶⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020 (updated 30 January 2020), [url](#)

attacked by the Taliban once more in February 2020 in the area of Doshi district, resulting in the killing of a truck driver and the kidnapping of two civilians.¹⁸⁶⁷

According to an international source Lifos spoke to in January 2020, the highway between Kabul and Kandahar, passing through the provinces of Wardak and Ghazni, has been insecure for years¹⁸⁶⁸ -with more incidents recorded in 2019 compared to previous years. AGEs were reported active on this highway¹⁸⁶⁹, controlling some parts of the road¹⁸⁷⁰ and using roadblocks to target government employees and members of the Afghan security forces.¹⁸⁷¹ In August 2019, a police outpost securing the Kabul-Kandahar Highway was attacked by the Taliban, killing and wounding several police officers.¹⁸⁷² In November 2019, the same highway was blocked by hundreds of drivers protesting the killing of a truck driver extorted by ANP officers in Zabul province. The highway was reopened after mediation by local elders and provincial council members.¹⁸⁷³

The Kabul-Jalalabad Highway, an important trade route and often considered ‘one of the world’s most dangerous roads’ (referring to the numerous traffic accidents that have happened on this road), passes through areas where AGEs have been reported active -such as Surobi district.¹⁸⁷⁴ Along this highway lies the highly secured Green Village compound in Kabul City, which has been attacked several times in 2019¹⁸⁷⁵, resulting in temporary road closures.¹⁸⁷⁶ An international source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019, described the highway between Kabul and Jalalabad as ‘sufficiently safe’, also for international travellers.¹⁸⁷⁷ In July 2020, 22 Taliban militants were killed or wounded during an ANDSF operation along this highway¹⁸⁷⁸, which reportedly faced increased security threats.¹⁸⁷⁹

According to AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, 20 kilometres of the Kabul-Bamyan Highway, which connects the Hazarajat region to the capital, are under Taliban control. The militant group directly intervenes in several areas of service delivery in the region, government provision remaining limited. The Kabul-Bamyan Highway, going through Jalrez district in Wardak province, has many side roads and mountain paths leading to several districts in Wardak, Parwan and Kabul provinces. Qaane describes these as ‘supply and escape routes’ providing safe havens to militant groups and impeding the movement of government forces. The highway has two direct passes to Kabul’s Paghman district through Kohna Khumar and Sanglakh.¹⁸⁸⁰

Security threats reportedly increased on the highway connecting Kabul to Logar and Paktia provinces in July 2020.¹⁸⁸¹ According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, the location of Chaharasyab district along this highway is strategic for both the government and AGEs, affecting the security situation of the district’s areas beside the highway.¹⁸⁸²

¹⁸⁶⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020 (updated 27 February 2020), [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁸ Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶⁹ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/73/777-S/2019/193, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 14; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (17 - 23 February 2020), 23 February 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁷⁰ An international source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁸⁷¹ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 52

¹⁸⁷² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 67

¹⁸⁷⁴ Diplomat (The), Next Stop Jalalabad: Traveling One of the World’s Most Dangerous Roads, 13 December 2015, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁵ NYT, After Bombing, Afghans Demand That Foreigners Leave Their Neighbourhood, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁶ Al Jazeera, Fatal Blast Rocks Afghan Capital Kabul, 15 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁷ Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁸⁷⁸ Khaama Press, 22 Taliban Militants Killed, Wounded on Kabul-Jalalabad Highway, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷⁹ Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁰ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸¹ Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸² Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 25

2.15.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 27 persons displaced from Kabul province, constituting a group of 5 families coming from Paghman district and finding refuge in neighbouring Laghman province (in Mehtarlam/Bad Pash district) in August 2019.¹⁸⁸³

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 4 062 persons displaced to Kabul province, coming from different provinces (Ghazni¹⁸⁸⁴, Logar, Faryab, Jawzjan, Baghlan¹⁸⁸⁵, Kunar¹⁸⁸⁶, Nangarhar¹⁸⁸⁷, Kapisa¹⁸⁸⁸, Wardak¹⁸⁸⁹, Badakhshan, Kunduz¹⁸⁹⁰, Samangan, Takhar, Sar-e Pul, Balkh, Laghman, Daykundi and Bamyan) and all finding refuge in Kabul district. Most IDPs arriving in Kabul province came from Kunar (679) (mainly from Chapadara district) and Baghlan (651) (mainly from Dahan-e Ghor district) provinces. Smaller groups of more than 300 IDPs came from the provinces of Logar (all from Baraki Barak district), Kunduz (mainly from Khanabad and Chardarah districts) and Nangarhar (mainly from Sherzad and Khogyani districts).¹⁸⁹¹ In June 2019 during an Operational Coordination Team (OCT) meeting in Kabul, the head of the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) reported on the arrival of nearly 100 IDP families in Kabul, displaced from Khwaja Omari district in Ghazni province after the area had been recaptured by armed opposition groups.¹⁸⁹² In January and February 2020, UNOCHA registered 336 IDPs arriving in Kabul from the region of the central highlands (Bamyan and Daykundi provinces).¹⁸⁹³

IOM ranked Kabul province as fourth out of five provinces hosting the most IDPs and returnees and Kabul district sixth out of the countrywide top 25 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs.¹⁸⁹⁴ According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Kabul province resided in Kabul district, followed by Bagrami, Dehsabz and Chaharasyab districts.¹⁸⁹⁵ According to UNHCR, Kabul and Nangarhar provinces remain the most attractive return destinations¹⁸⁹⁶, counting for a third of all returnees countrywide and 'returnees who do not settle in their provinces of origin move to relatively urban areas in search of safety, services and jobs.'¹⁸⁹⁷

¹⁸⁸³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 - 27 October 2019), 27 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁸⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 - 27 October 2019), 27 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (12 - 19 August 2019), 19 August 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁸⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (12 - 19 August 2019), 19 August 2019, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁸⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 - 27 October 2019), 27 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (12 - 19 August 2019), 19 August 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 - 27 October 2019), 27 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹² UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kabul Province - Meeting Summary, 25 June 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁸⁹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 14 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁴ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results March - June 2019, 1 July 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 6, 9

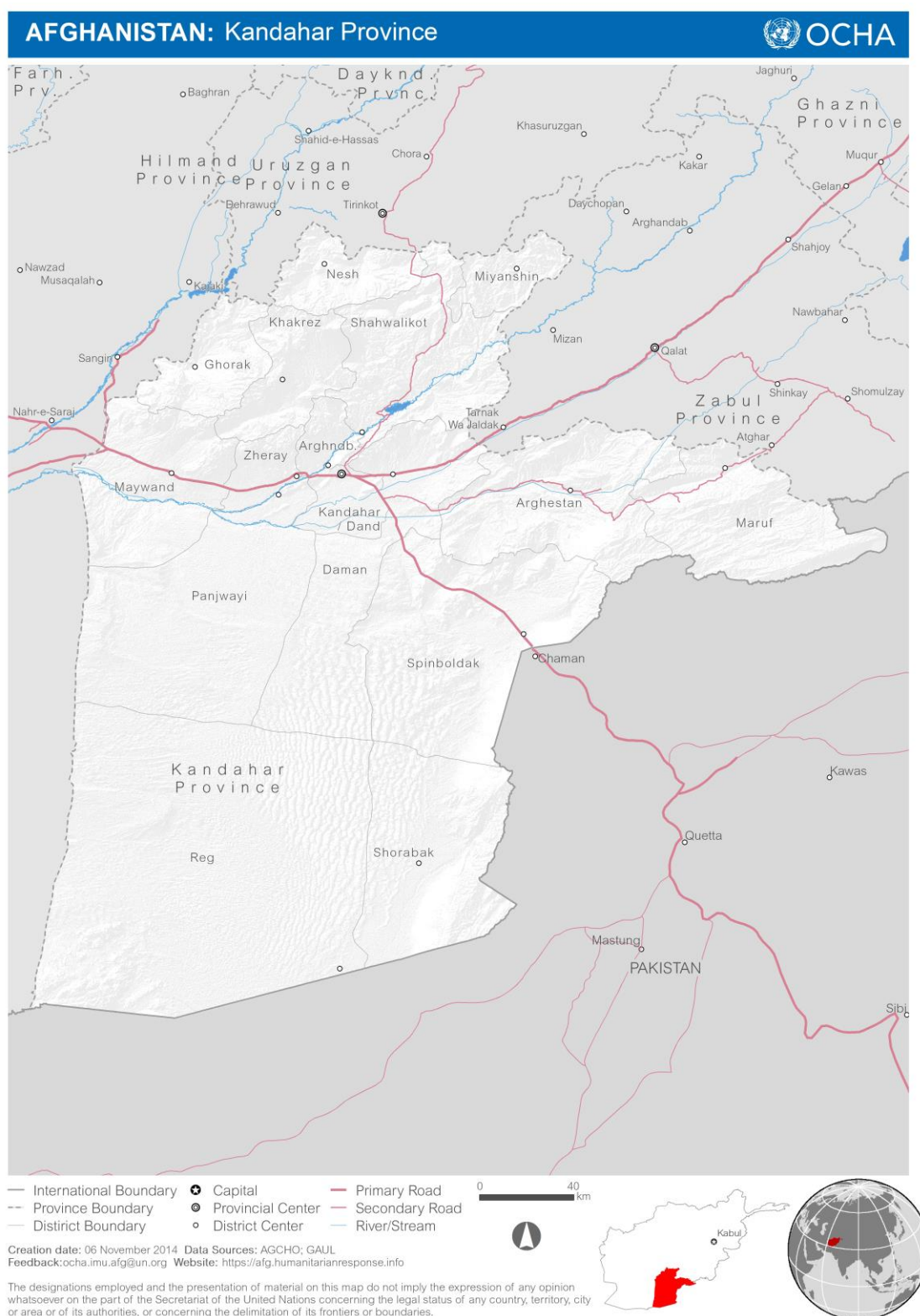
¹⁸⁹⁵ IOM, Afghanistan - Kabul Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 6; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) I June 2019 I Province: Kabul, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹⁶ UNHCR, Pakistan: Voluntary Repatriation of Afghans from Pakistan Update, 30 April 2019, [url](#), p. 1; IOM and UNHCR, Returns to Afghanistan 2018 - Joint IOM-UNHCR Summary Report, 25 June 2019, [url](#), p. 6; UNHCR, Afghanistan: Voluntary Repatriation Update, 23 July 2019, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁸⁹⁷ WBG and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, June 2019, [url](#), p. 6

2.16 Kandahar

2.16.1 General description of the province



Map 16: Afghanistan – Kandahar province, source: UNOCHA¹⁸⁹⁸

¹⁸⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kandahar Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

The province of Kandahar is situated in the south of Afghanistan, bordering on Uruzgan and Zabul to the north, Helmand to the west, and Pakistan to the south and east.¹⁸⁹⁹ Kandahar is divided into the following administrative units: the provincial capital Kandahar, Arghandab, Daman, Panjwayee, Zhire, Shah Wali Kot, Khakrez, Arghistan, Maiwand, Ghorak, Spin Boldak, Nesh, Miyanishin, Shorabak, Maruf, Reg (Shiga), and the 'temporary' districts of Dand and Takhtapul.¹⁹⁰⁰ Temporary districts are administrative units that '[...] have been approved after entry into force of the 2004 constitution by the president due to security or other considerations, but have not yet been approved by parliament'.¹⁹⁰¹

According to NSIA estimates, the population of the province is 1 399 594 in 2020-21, with 523 259 of its residents living in the provincial capital Kandahar City¹⁹⁰², which is the second largest city in Afghanistan.¹⁹⁰³ The majority of Kandahar's population belongs to Pashtun tribes with the confederation of the Durani tribes being the largest one. The Balochs live in the Kandahar's desert leading a nomadic life and they often deals with smuggling. Hazara and Tajiks, as well as other ethnicities are usually referred to as *Farsiwan*, i.e. Farsi/Dari speakers. They mainly live in cities and towns.¹⁹⁰⁴

The Ring Road connects the provincial capital of Kandahar with the major population centres of Herat and Kabul. A northbound road towards Uruzgan forks in Kandahar City.¹⁹⁰⁵ In March 2018, the Afghan news portal Tolonews described the highway as being '[...] in extremely bad condition due to heavy road usage, a lack of maintenance and continued attacks by insurgents'.¹⁹⁰⁶ Heading southwards, a road connects the city of Kandahar with the Afghan-Pakistani border crossing at Spin Boldak-Chaman.¹⁹⁰⁷ It is one of the most important border-crossing with Pakistan, leading to Quetta at Pakistani side. Border towns Spin Boldak and Chaman are considered as the major smuggling hubs with flourishing bazaar called Wesh situated in Spin Boldak.¹⁹⁰⁸ Pakistani government has been trying to build a fence along the border to prevent illegal border-crossing from Afghanistan. Spin Boldak residents protested against the fence and Afghan security services tried many times to prevent the fence construction anytime Pakistani forces attempted to have a fencing operation completed¹⁹⁰⁹, which leads to frequent cross-border clashes and shelling.¹⁹¹⁰

According to the airport website, an airport with scheduled passenger services to domestic and international destinations exists in Kandahar City.¹⁹¹¹

In 2016, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project, aiming at transporting gas from Turkmenistan to India, was inaugurated.¹⁹¹² The pipeline was projected to lead through Afghanistan alongside the Ring Road from Herat to Kandahar¹⁹¹³ and would therefore intersect Taliban-

¹⁸⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kandahar Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁰ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 37

¹⁹⁰¹ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰² Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, [url](#), p. 37

¹⁹⁰³ Reporterly.net, 80% People Infected With COVID-19: How Did Kandahar Get Here? 23 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁴ Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the 'American tribe', AAN 12 August 2019, [url](#); Naval Postgraduate School, Kandahar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#);

¹⁹⁰⁵ iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁶ Tolonews, Seven Die In Kandahar-Herat Highway Accident, 14 March 2018, [url](#);

¹⁹⁰⁷ iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰⁸ Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the 'American tribe', AAN 12 August 2019, [url](#);

¹⁹⁰⁹ Afghanistan Times, Army repulses Pakistan's Durand Line fence bid, 13 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁰ Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the 'American tribe', AAN 12 August 2019, [url](#);

¹⁹¹¹ Kandahar Airport Webpage, n/d, <https://kandaharairport.net/>

¹⁹¹² Tolonews, All You Need To Know About TAPI Project, 24 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹¹³ Tolonews, All You Need To Know About TAPI Project, 24 February 2018, [url](#)

controlled areas.¹⁹¹⁴ The project on Afghan side has not started due to security reasons, however authorities prepared special combat unit to secure pipeline construction.¹⁹¹⁵

According to the UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Kandahar province decreased by 38 % in 2019, compared to 2018.¹⁹¹⁶

In March and April 2019, Kandahar was affected by severe flood, which also stopped some AGEs activities.¹⁹¹⁷

As of end of June 2020, Kandahar was the third worst COVID-19 affected province in Afghanistan. It was put under lockdown at the end of March, but most people did not comply with the restrictions imposed. Diagnostic laboratory in Kandahar was able to make tests and was also responsible for testing people from Zabul, Nimroz, Helmand and Uruzgan provinces.¹⁹¹⁸

2.16.2 Conflict background and actors in Kandahar

Kandahar is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps, supported by the US Train, Advice, and Assist Command-South (TAAC-S) which has its headquarters in the province.¹⁹¹⁹ There is also an US military airfield in the province. The number of foreign soldiers decreased after 2014 but in 2018 more US troops were deployed along with A-10 aircraft and several MQ-9 reaper drones.¹⁹²⁰ The counterterrorism operations are under responsibility of NDS 03, called also Kandahar Strike Force (KSF) which is based in the former headquarters of Mullah Omar.¹⁹²¹

AAN credited the years of relative stability in the centre of the province to the presence of the powerful strongman and police chief General Abdul Razeq.¹⁹²² Razeq managed to attract some local commanders who helped US to push out the Taliban from the province between 2010 and 2014. Razeq appointed them as police chiefs of key districts. ALP, in particular, was an important element of security management. Razeq was, however, accused of serious human rights abuses.¹⁹²³ He managed to keep the Taliban away from the central Kandahar districts but he did not prevent some Taliban activity there, including bomb attacks and targeted killings. Since 2016, however the Taliban have started regaining control in more remote districts of the province and in October 2018, Razeq was assassinated, allegedly by the Taliban¹⁹²⁴ and soon replaced by his brother, Tadin Khan Atsakzai.¹⁹²⁵ According to local officials and residents, the security situation deteriorated following the assassination of Razeq, with the number of targeted killing increasing and security services losing more staff.¹⁹²⁶ In 2019, attacks increased in the remote districts, but the central parts remained relatively stable under government control. In order to prevent expansion by the Taliban, the government carried out armed operations, including air strikes.¹⁹²⁷

¹⁹¹⁴ Reuters, Five working to clear way for gas pipeline killed in Afghanistan, 21 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁵ Xinhua, Special Afghan combat unit starts operation for TAPI project security 21 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁶ Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁷ Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (2): The collapse foretold that did not happen, AAN, 14 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁸ Reporterly, 80% People Infected With COVID-19: How Did Kandahar Get Here? 23 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹¹⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁹²⁰ Stars and Stripes, Violence escalates in strategic Afghan province as US continues peace talks, 6 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹²¹ HRW, "They've Shot Many Like This", 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹²² Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban's strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹²³ Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the 'American tribe', AAN, 12 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁴ Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban's strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁵ Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the 'American tribe', AAN 12 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁶ Stars and Stripes, Violence escalates in strategic Afghan province as US continues peace talks, 6 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁷ Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (2): The collapse foretold that did not happen, AAN, 14 August 2019, [url](#)

For the Taliban, Kandahar is a strategic province, not only because it is considered to be the birthplace of the group', but also because it borders with the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, which 'serves as the group's safe haven as well as a prime recruitment center'. In addition, Kandahar is a main producer and distributor of opium, a major source of the Taliban's income.¹⁹²⁸

As of August 2019, AAN noted that except from the provincial capital, 'government forces only fully or predominantly control the districts of Spin Boldak, Dand, Daman and Arghandab out of Kandahar's 17 official and unofficial districts', while the Taliban continued to control most of Kandahar province. AAN also stated that 'in Maruf in the east and Ghorak, Nesh, Mianeshin and, after recent Taleban forays, in Khakrez – all in the north – only the district centres are in the government's hands and remain practically under Taleban siege. In Arghistan, also in the east, in Maiwand in Middle Kandahar and in the southern districts of Reg and Shorabak, the situation is not much different.' Kandahar City is surrounded by Taliban from all four sides, but AGEs are still kept in the distance from it and they are not able to storm the city directly as it happened in case of Lashkargah (Helmand) and Tarin Kot (Uruzgan). The Taliban however is capable to conduct the terrorist attacks, assassinations and small-scale shootings there.¹⁹²⁹ Similarly, local officials stated that, in many Kandahar's districts only the district centre is controlled by the government and the rest of the district is under Taliban control.¹⁹³⁰ According to LWJ, the districts of Ghorak, Nesh, Miya Nishin and Maruf are under total control of Taliban. Maywand, Khakrez, Shah Wali Kot, Arghandab, Tarnak Wa Jaldak, Arghistan on the north and Registan and Shorabak on the south are still contested.¹⁹³¹ In October 2019, US and Afghan forces reportedly conducted air raids on Taliban positions in Maruf, Shah Wali Kot.¹⁹³²

The UN reported on increased presence of anti-government elements on major transit routes in Afghanistan, including highways between Kabul and Kandahar, and Kandahar and Tirm Kot.¹⁹³³

It is reported that ISKP is also present in the province. At the beginning of April 2020, NDS forces detained several members of the top leadership of the organisation in Kandahar, including the ISKP's leader in Afghanistan, Abdullah Orakzai alias Aslam Farooqi, who originates from Pakistan.¹⁹³⁴

2.16.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.16.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 467 civilian casualties (121 deaths and 346 injured) in the province of Kandahar. This represents a decrease of 13 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were non-suicide and suicide IEDs, followed by search operations.¹⁹³⁵ Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Kandahar in the first quarter of 2020, reporting an increase in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of the year, with 101-125 casualties recorded (from 1 April to 30 June 2020).¹⁹³⁶

¹⁹²⁸ LWJ, Taliban overruns Afghan army camp in Kandahar, 19 October 2017, [url](#)

¹⁹²⁹ Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (2): The collapse foretold that did not happen, AAN, 14 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁰ Stars and Stripes, Violence escalates in strategic Afghan province as US continues peace talks, 6 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹³¹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

¹⁹³² Anadolu Agency, Afghan, US forces kill over 80 Taliban insurgents, 27 October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹³³ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace & Security, A/73/777-S/2019/193, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁹³⁴ The Diplomat, The Islamic State Remains Alive in Afghanistan, 27 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹³⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹⁹³⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported total 1 197 incidents related to security in Kandahar province, of which 687 battles, 475 remote violence, 35 cases of violence against civilians.¹⁹³⁷

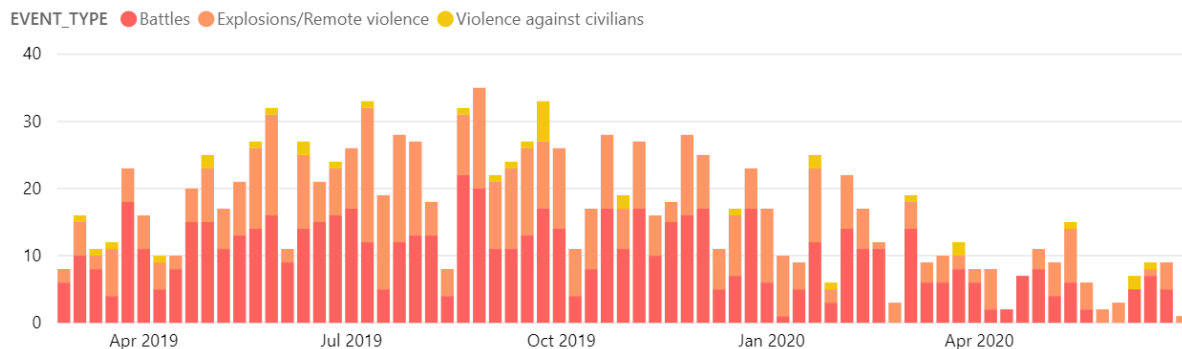


Figure 18. Kandahar - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data¹⁹³⁸

According to UNAMA, the main cause of civilian deaths in 2019 were IEDs explosions.¹⁹³⁹ According to ACLED data, IEDs and other remote violence caused over 1 290 fatalities in the reporting period in the province, most of them were security forces members and AGEs fighters, however among them there were also civilians.¹⁹⁴⁰ On 15 July 2019, a convoy of cars heading for the mosque exploded on the pressure-plate IED planted by Taliban, killing 13 civilians and wounding 40 others.¹⁹⁴¹ On 24 September 2019, four civilians were killed including two children and a local journalist when a bomb exploded next to the gate of Ashraf Ghani's campaign office in Kandahar City.¹⁹⁴² On 3 June 2020, nine passengers travelling by bus between different districts of the province were killed by explosion of roadside bomb.¹⁹⁴³

In July 2019 Taliban allegedly attacked residents of eight villages in the Shah Wali Kot district, forcing their dwellers to provide food and shelter to the fighters. When they refused, elders in the villages were severely beaten. The Taliban also blocked the road and villagers could not get to their fields. According to the elders, many villagers moved out from the area to the Kandahar and other districts.¹⁹⁴⁴

Kandahar City witnessed a number of targeted killings in the reported period. AGEs targeted a food contractor in May 2019, an off-duty military pilot in January 2020, a money charger, a policewoman and a tribal elder in separate attacks in March 2020, a former policeman, a doctor and a former district governor of Sangin district in three separate attacks in June 2020.¹⁹⁴⁵ On 30 June 2019 the Taliban killed eight election officials registering voters in Maruf district.¹⁹⁴⁶ On 28 September 2019, Taliban claimed that election centres in Khakrez, Maruf, Miyanishin, Naish, Shorbak, and Ghorak districts were closed because personnel responsible of validating identity documents were killed.¹⁹⁴⁷

¹⁹³⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Explosions/Remote Violence; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

¹⁹³⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Explosions/Remote Violence; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

¹⁹³⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 68

¹⁹⁴⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Explosions/Remote Violence; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

¹⁹⁴¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 43

¹⁹⁴² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴³ Associated Press, Bus strikes roadside bomb in southern Afghanistan; 9 killed, 3 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁴ Salaam Times, Taliban attack Kandahar residents for refusing to abandon homes, 19 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

¹⁹⁴⁶ Associated Press, Taliban attack kills 8 election officials in Afghanistan, 30 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

One of the most important causes of civilian deaths in the province were search operations also called ‘night raids’ usually conducted by NDS Special Forces.¹⁹⁴⁸ These forces are reportedly guilty of extrajudicial killings, torture and unlawful and arbitrary detentions.¹⁹⁴⁹ On 10 April 2019, NDS SF killed a school principal and arrested five other persons in Panjwai district.¹⁹⁵⁰ In September 2019, NDS allegedly tortured and killed local imam in Kandahar City what sparked mass protests in the front of governor house.¹⁹⁵¹ On 16 September 2019, one woman was killed, the second was mutilated and three others were arrested by Afghan and NATO forces in Shah Wali Kot district. In the same district in December 2019, NATO and Afghan security forces killed 8 civilians and arrested another 4 and on 10 April 2020 US drone killed three civilians there.¹⁹⁵²

2.16.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 5 051 persons displaced from Kandahar province. They were mainly displaced within the province itself. Main destinations were Kandahar and Spin Boldak districts. The biggest group nearly 1 800 persons left Shah Wali Kot district in December 2019 and resettled to Kandahar/Dand district. The group of 377 persons was displaced to Tirinkot City in Uruzgan province.¹⁹⁵³

In the reporting period, 5 286 persons were displaced to Kandahar province (Kandahar city or Spin Boldak) from other provinces, including 1 712 persons from Helmand, 1 378 from Farah, 983 from Daykundi, 863 from Uruzgan and 350 persons from Jawzjan.¹⁹⁵⁴

¹⁹⁴⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 64; Human Rights Watch, “They’ve Shot Many Like This”, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 64; Human Rights Watch, “They’ve Shot Many Like This”, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Imam’s death sparks anti-NDS protest in Kandahar, 8 September 2019, [url](#)

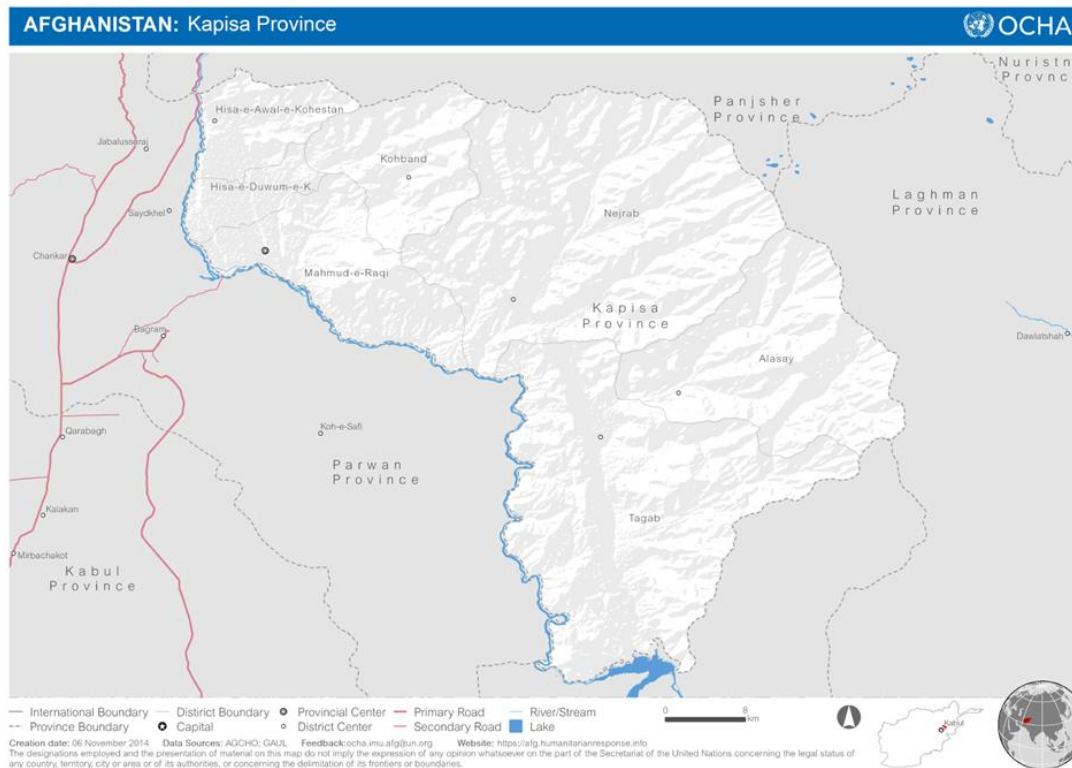
¹⁹⁵² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

2.17 Kapisa

2.17.1 General description of the province



Map 17: Afghanistan – Kapisa province, source: UNOCHA¹⁹⁵⁵

Kapisa province is located in the central region of Afghanistan and has borders with the provinces of Panjsher to the north, Laghman to the east, Kabul to the south, and Parwan to the west.¹⁹⁵⁶ Kapisa is divided into the following administrative units: Alasay, Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan, Hisa-i Duwum-e Kohestan, Kohband, Mahmud-e Raqi, Nejrab and Tagab. The provincial capital is Mahmud-e Raqi.¹⁹⁵⁷

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Kapisa province has a population of 488 298.¹⁹⁵⁸ The main ethnic groups in Kapisa are Tajik, Pashtun¹⁹⁵⁹, and Nuristani.¹⁹⁶⁰ Tajiks, constituting the largest single group, are mainly living in the northern part of the province. Pashtuns, mainly from the Ghilzai tribe, inhabit the southern district of Tagab.¹⁹⁶¹ Other groups present include Hazara¹⁹⁶² and Pashai, the latter residing in the mountainous areas of Alasay and Kohband districts.¹⁹⁶³

A primary road connects Kapisa's capital Mahmud-e Raqi to Kabul City.¹⁹⁶⁴

¹⁹⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kapisa Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kapisa Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵⁷ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Kapisa, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁹⁵⁸ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁹⁵⁹ FP, Are Ethnic Politics Afghanistan's Great Hope?, 11 November 2014, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁰ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kapisa Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Tolonews, Provincial Profile: Kapisa, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹⁶¹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kapisa Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Ali, O., Fire in the Pashai Hills: A Two-District Case Study from Kapisa, AAN, 6 April 2015, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶² Tolonews, Provincial Profile: Kapisa, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹⁶³ Ali, O., Fire in the Pashai Hills: A Two-District Case Study from Kapisa, AAN, 6 April 2015, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kapisa Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#)

UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52 % reduction in opium-poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region (including Kapisa province) and the central highlands.¹⁹⁶⁵ According to UNODC's Opium Survey from 2018, opium-poppy was mainly cultivated in the districts of Tagab and Alasay.¹⁹⁶⁶

2.17.2 Conflict background and actors in Kapisa

According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, Kapisa province has strategic importance, as '[...] it is a small province in the middle of almost everything: it is easy for insurgents to try and reach Kapisa's capital and the neighbouring provinces.' Foschini suggests Kapisa to be 'sociologically divided' between southern districts more sympathetic towards militant groups, and a northern part, 'where allegiance to Jamiat-e Islami makes community support for the Taliban less likely'.¹⁹⁶⁷ Kapisa's southern district of Tagab is connected to the Uzbini Valley in Surobi district of Kabul province and further to Bad Pakh district in Laghman province, through relatively easily traversable passes. According to Foschini, this broader region became 'an important crossing point and sanctuary for insurgents moving deeper into Afghanistan from the border area [with Pakistan]'.¹⁹⁶⁸

According to a 2014 report by the New York Times, southern Kapisa 'has always been difficult terrain', adding that the battle between Taliban militants and government forces intensified after the French ISAF forces left the province in 2012. The New York Times traced the Taliban's success partially to a lack of capacity or 'unwillingness' by the Afghan security forces to overtake Taliban-controlled areas in Kapisa, leading to US Special Forces' allegations of infiltration of the Afghan army by the militants or close cooperation between the ANA and AGEs. The Taliban in the area, on the other hand, were described as a disciplined force, 'able to operate freely'.¹⁹⁶⁹

AAN analyst Obaid Ali defined the political landscape in Kapisa in 2015 as characterised by '[...] the never-ending story of local warlords and Taliban competing with each other [...]', in combination with '[...] the poor economic situation of many residents [which] contributes to the high rates of militancy and private feuds [...]' in some districts of the province.¹⁹⁷⁰

Remote districts such as Nejrab, Tagab and Alasay have been reported to be the most insecure areas of the province.¹⁹⁷¹ An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated Tagab, Alasay and Nejrab districts as 'contested'. A USDOD assessment of July 2019, reported by LWJ in the same map, designated Nejrab district as 'government-influenced'. Kapisa's remaining districts were categorised as 'government-controlled' or 'undetermined' in this assessment.¹⁹⁷² In May 2020, the UN Security Council reported on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made in Kapisa province.¹⁹⁷³

¹⁹⁶⁵ Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁶ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 17, 23

¹⁹⁶⁷ Foschini, F., In Kabul's Shadow: The Attacks in the Provinces on 15-16 April, AAN, 24 April 2012, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁸ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing Some of Afghanistan's Most Notorious Hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶⁹ NYT, Hour's Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁰ Ali, O., Fire in the Pashai Hills: A Two-District Case Study from Kapisa, AAN, 6 April 2015, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷¹ Ali, O., Fire in the Pashai Hills: A Two-District Case Study from Kapisa, AAN, 6 April 2015, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban Sniper Killed in Armed Forces Operation in Kapisa Province, 29 April 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Security Forces Kill Taliban's Suicide Attacks Planner in Kapisa Province, 23 May 2019, [url](#); Emergency - Life Support for Civilian War Victims, A Quiet Revolution: the Emergency Anabah Maternity Centre and Female Empowerment, 16 October 2019, [url](#), p. 27; Tolonews, 4 Security Force Members Killed in Kapisa, 21 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷² LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)

¹⁹⁷³ UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9

Media sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in Nejrab¹⁹⁷⁴, Tagab¹⁹⁷⁵ and Alasay¹⁹⁷⁶ districts. In March 2019, the villages of Afghanistan, Pachaghan and Ghin Dara in Nejrab were reported to be captured by Taliban militants.¹⁹⁷⁷ In March 2020, a Taliban attack in Afghanistan village in Nejrab was reported, described as the first battle in the area after it had been cleared from the Taliban¹⁹⁷⁸ in December 2019.¹⁹⁷⁹ Mid-June 2020, Taliban militants reportedly advanced to the district centre of Tagab, after taking 12 checkpoints of local uprising forces.¹⁹⁸⁰ At the end of June 2020, the villages of Firoozkhil, Turkandian, Baishkel, Sarginan, Khanan and Badakhil in Tagab were reportedly cleared from the Taliban during ANA operations.¹⁹⁸¹ Several prominent Taliban figures were killed or arrested in the aforementioned three districts.¹⁹⁸² In May 2019, a senior Taliban leader, reportedly involved in planning suicide attacks in Kapisa province, was killed in Nejrab.¹⁹⁸³ In August 2019, the Taliban's deputy shadow governor for Panjsher province, reportedly involved in activities of the militant group in Kapisa and neighbouring provinces, was killed in Nejrab.¹⁹⁸⁴ In the same month, a Taliban military commander, reportedly involved in various militant activities in the area, was arrested while planting an IED in Shinkai village in Tagab district.¹⁹⁸⁵ In November 2019, a Taliban military commission leader, described as an instrumental figure in AGE activities in Kapisa province, was killed in the Ashpi Valley of Alasay district.¹⁹⁸⁶

Before Gulbuddin Hekmatyar signed a peace agreement with the Afghan government in September 2016, Kapisa was considered one of Hezb-e Islami's strongholds.¹⁹⁸⁷

In November 2019 and February 2020, USDOD reported on small groups of ISKP supporters in Kapisa province.¹⁹⁸⁸ One security incident specifically attributed to ISKP has been recorded in Kapisa between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED.¹⁹⁸⁹ In February 2020, a dozen ISKP militants were killed and a hideout of the group was destroyed in a ground operation by Afghan commandos with air support in Nejrab district.¹⁹⁹⁰ Additionally, ACLED recorded two incidents in August and September 2019 in which Afghan military forces responded to attacks by suspected Taliban and/or ISKP militants in Tagab district, as well as several incidents in which Taliban and/or ISKP militants were wounded and/or killed during military operations in Nejrab and Tagab districts.¹⁹⁹¹ In a 2020 USIP report, analyst Borhan

¹⁹⁷⁴ Ariana News, Roadside Bomb Kills 4 Civilians in Kapisa, 21 May 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Taliban Militants Kill Six Afghan Police at Remote Checkpoint Northeast of Kabul, 5 October 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, 4 Security Force Members Killed in Kapisa, 21 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa - Meeting Summary, 2 April 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁹⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Military Official Arrested in Tagab District, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁶ Tolonews, Three Civilians Killed in Kapisa Blast, 23 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁷ Afghanistan Times, 65 Afghan Forces Dead in Helmand Attacks, 24 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁸ Tolonews, 4 Security Force Members Killed in Kapisa, 21 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷⁹ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 29 January 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁹⁸⁰ Tolonews, 4 Public Uprising Forces, 11 Taliban Killed in Kapisa: Official, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Security Forces Killed, 5 Injured in Kapisa Clash, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸² See sources mentioned below.

¹⁹⁸³ Khaama Press, Security Forces Kill Taliban's Suicide Attacks Planner in Kapisa Province, 23 May 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjsher Killed: MoI, 4 August 2019, [url](#); Ariana News, Taliban's Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjshir Killed, 4 August 2019, [url](#); Afghanistan Times, Afghan Forces Killed Taliban's Designated Deputy Governor for Panjshir, 4 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Military Official Arrested in Tagab District, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Military Commission Head Killed in Kapisa, 29 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁷ Van Bijlert, M. and Ruttig, T., Almost Signed? The Peace Agreement with Hezb-e Islami, AAN, 21 May 2016, [url](#)

¹⁹⁸⁸ USDOD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 July - 30 September 2019, 20 November 2019, [url](#), p. 18; USDOD, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom's Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 October - 31 December 2019, 19 February 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁹⁸⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Airstrikes Kill 13 Daesh Rebels in Kapisa, Kunar, 21 February 2020, [url](#); Bakhtar News, 12 ISIS Fighters Killed in Kapisa Operation, 22 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

Osman mentioned Tagab and Nejrab districts as areas where ISKP has been recruiting for its Kabul cell.¹⁹⁹²

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Kapisa is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps. Kapisa province is included in the Train, Advise and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-E is led by US and Polish forces and has its headquarters in Laghman province.¹⁹⁹³

2.17.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.17.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 124 civilian casualties (49 deaths and 75 injured) in Kapisa province. This represented a decrease of 11 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by non-suicide IEDs and air strikes.¹⁹⁹⁴ Resolute Support¹⁹⁹⁵ recorded between 102 and 150 civilian casualties in Kapisa province in the first half of 2020, with no variation between the first and second quarter of the year.¹⁹⁹⁶

ACLED collected data on 265 violent events in Kapisa province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 206 were coded as 'battles', 49 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 10 as 'violence against civilians'. Tagab and Nejrab stood out as districts where most incidents were reported, with more than 100 recorded incidents in each district -compared to 23 or less recorded incidents in Kapisa's other districts. ACLED recorded the lowest numbers of incidents Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan and Hisa-i Duwum-e Kohestan districts, followed by Kohband district. In the provincial capital Mahmud-e Raqi 23 incidents were recorded.¹⁹⁹⁷

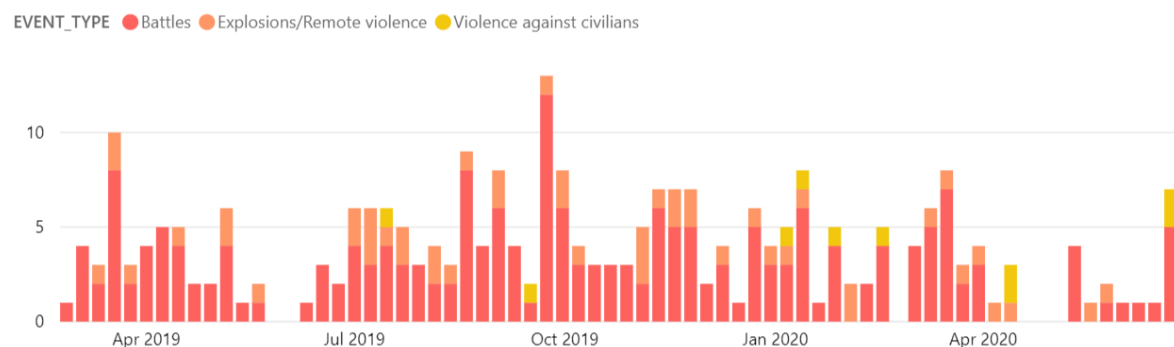


Figure 19. Kapisa - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data¹⁹⁹⁸

ACLED coded around 78 % of the violent incidents in Kapisa province as 'battles', nearly all 'armed clashes'. With the exception of Alasay district, this category represented the most prevalent incident type in all Kapisa's districts, also in Mahmud-e Raqi district where the provincial capital is located. The majority of these armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis* (the term *arbaki* is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-

¹⁹⁹² Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join Islamic State*, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 11-12

¹⁹⁹³ USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020*, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁹⁹⁴ UNAMA, *Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019*, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

¹⁹⁹⁵ Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.

¹⁹⁹⁶ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

¹⁹⁹⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

¹⁹⁹⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kapisa, [url](#)

government militias).¹⁹⁹⁹ Examples of such incidents included assaults on military or police checkpoints/outposts in Abad village near the provincial capital Mahmud-e Raqi in July 2019²⁰⁰⁰, in Nejrab district in October 2019²⁰⁰¹, in February 2020²⁰⁰², in March 2020²⁰⁰³ and in June 2020²⁰⁰⁴, and in Tagab district in March 2020²⁰⁰⁵ and in June 2020²⁰⁰⁶; as well as attacks/ambushes on the convoy/vehicle of an Afghan local police commander and an intelligence chief in Alasay district in December 2019²⁰⁰⁷ and January 2020²⁰⁰⁸; and an attack on the head of Kapisa's police traffic department in Mahmud-e Raqi district in June 2020.²⁰⁰⁹ No civilian casualties were reported in these incidents.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.²⁰¹⁰ These incidents involved several operations in Nejrab district in April 2019²⁰¹¹, in May 2019²⁰¹², in August 2019²⁰¹³ and in November 2019²⁰¹⁴, killing several Taliban militants (see above). In Tagab district, various Taliban militants were killed in operations of the Afghan Special Forces in June 2019²⁰¹⁵ and a Taliban military commander was arrested by the police while placing IEDs in Shinkai village in August 2019.²⁰¹⁶ In Alasay district, four Taliban militants were wounded during a security forces raid in July 2019.²⁰¹⁷ During an operation in Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan district in June 2020, two NDS officers were reportedly killed by the gunman they aimed to arrest.²⁰¹⁸

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces²⁰¹⁹, represented 8 % of all reported security incidents in Kapisa.²⁰²⁰ Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. This happened in May 2019, when a civilian motorcycle hit a roadside bomb in Nejrab district,

¹⁹⁹⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁰ Tolonews, Two Policemen Killed in Taliban Attack in Kapisa, 30 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁰¹ RFE/RL, Taliban Militants Kill Six Afghan Police at Remote Checkpoint Northeast of Kabul, 5 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁰² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020 (updated 27 February 2020), [url](#); Reuters, U.S.-Taliban Pact to Cut Violence About to Start, Afghan Minister Says Amid Clashes, 18 February 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Kill 9 Pro-Government Fighters in Kapisa, 18 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁰³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Security Personnel, 3 Militants Killed in Kapisa Clash, 21 March 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 4 Security Force Members Killed in Kapisa, 21 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Security Forces Killed, 5 Injured in Kapisa Clash, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁶ Tolonews, 4 Public Uprising Forces, 11 Taliban Killed in Kapisa: Official, 15 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁷ VoA, Taliban Assault on Army Base Kills 7 Afghan Soldiers, 24 December 2019, [url](#); Reportedly, Afghan Local Police Commander Killed in Taliban Ambush in Kapisa, 24 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kapisa: District Intelligence Chief Killed in Taliban Ambush, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁰⁹ Tolonews, Head of Kapisa Traffic Dept. Killed by Unknown Gunmen, 1 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁰¹¹ Khaama Press, Taliban Sniper Killed in Armed Forces Operation in Kapisa Province, 29 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁰¹² Khaama Press, Security Forces Kill Taliban's Suicide Attacks Planner in Kapisa Province, 23 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁰¹³ Ariana News, Taliban's Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjshir Killed, 4 August 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjsher Killed: Mol, 4 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kapisa Police Chief Injured in Clash with Taliban, 13 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁵ Khaama Press, 16 Taliban Militants Killed, Wounded in Kapisa, Wardak and Herat Provinces, 12 June 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 9 Militants Killed, Roadside Bombs and House-borne IED Destroyed in Kapisa and Wardak, 29 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Military Official Arrested in Tagab District, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Security Forces, 6 Rebels Killed in Fresh Offensives, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 NDS Agents Killed by Illegal Gunman in Kapisa, 21 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰¹⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 17-23, 23 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁰²⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

killing four civilians.²⁰²¹ In the same district in October 2019, six members of a family were killed in a roadside bomb explosion.²⁰²² Another such incident happened in November 2019, when a roadside bomb was hit by a pick-up in the district market of Alasay, killing at least 10 civilians.²⁰²³

Air/drone strikes represented 7 % of all reported violent incidents in Kapisa. Most air/drone strikes were carried out in Nejrab district (two out of three), followed by Alasay and Tagab districts. The majority of these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces, some were attributed to US forces.²⁰²⁴ While air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs in the aforementioned districts²⁰²⁵, some also caused civilian casualties such as air strikes carried out during security forces' operations at the end of December 2019 in several villages in Nejrab district, during which at least six civilians were killed.²⁰²⁶

Mortars and grenades fired by Taliban militants in Nejrab district in July 2019²⁰²⁷ and in Tagab district in March 2020²⁰²⁸ and April 2020²⁰²⁹, landed on civilian homes and/or vehicles and caused civilian casualties.

ACLED categorised 4 % of all violent incidents recorded in Kapisa as 'violence against civilians'.²⁰³⁰ These incidents involved for example: civilian houses being targeted by the Taliban with a grenade launcher in Nejrab district in July 2019²⁰³¹; civilians being killed in operations by Afghan and US security forces in Nejrab district in December 2019²⁰³²; a civilian vehicle being attacked by Taliban militants in Tagab district in March 2020²⁰³³; and the killing of an appellate court judge by unidentified gunmen in Afghanha village in the area of PD 1 in June 2020.²⁰³⁴

Kapisa's voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 remained just under 10 %. Along with Uruzgan province in the south and Farah province in the west, this represented one of the lowest scores in the whole country.²⁰³⁵ In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 51-75 % of respondents in Kapisa province reported to have experienced fear while voting.²⁰³⁶ Without providing further details, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on election related attacks on polling day in Kapisa province²⁰³⁷, including the beating of an agent of the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA).²⁰³⁸

2.17.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 924 persons displaced from Kapisa province, from whom the majority (833) found refuge within the province itself (in the

²⁰²¹ Ariana News, Roadside Bomb Kills 4 Civilians in Kapisa, 21 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁰²² Pajhwok Afghan News, Women Among 6 of a family Killed in Kapisa Blast, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁰²³ Pajhwok Afghan News, ANA Soldier Killed, 12 Wounded in Kapisa Explosion, 6 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁰²⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁰²⁵ Khaama Press, Up to 50 Militants Killed in Afghan Special Forces Operations, Airstrikes, 6 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan Air Force's A-29s and MD-530s Target Taliban Hideouts in Kunar and Kapisa, 23 March 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Military Commission Head Killed in Kapesa, 29 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁰²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Civilians Killed in Kapisa Operations, Says Rights Watchdog, 29 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁰²⁷ Khaama Press, Taliban Target Civilian Houses with Grenade Launcher in Kapisa: 201st Silab Corps, 18 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁰²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians, Policeman Killed in Kapesa Mortar Shell Attack, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁰²⁹ Khaama Press, Taliban Militants Kill 1 Civilian, Wound 3 Others in Kapisa Province, 20 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁰³⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁰³¹ Khaama Press, Taliban Target Civilian Houses with Grenade Launcher in Kapisa: 201st Silab Corps, 18 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁰³² Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Civilians Killed in Kapisa Operations, Says Rights Watchdog, 29 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁰³³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), [url](#)

²⁰³⁴ Tolonews, Gunmen Shoot and Kill Judge in Kapisa, 23 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰³⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 98

²⁰³⁶ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 62

²⁰³⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 Killed, 123 Wounded in Election Day Attacks, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁰³⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Observers Killed, Many Beaten on Polling Day, 17 October 2019, [url](#)

provincial capital Mahmud-e Raqi and in Nejrab, Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan and Hisa-i Duwum-e Kohestan districts). The remaining 91 IDPs from Kapisa sought shelter in neighbouring provinces Parwan (Charikar district) and Kabul. The majority of IDPs in Kapisa province were displaced from Nejrab district, mostly in March and December 2019 and in the beginning of January 2020. A smaller number of IDPs was displaced from Tagab district in March, July and September 2019 and March 2020, as well as from Alasay district in September 2019 and March 2020.²⁰³⁹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 193 persons displaced to Kapisa province coming from other provinces. In October 2019, a group of 70 IDPs from Chahab district in the northern province of Takhar found refuge in Kapisa's Hisa-i Duwum-e Kohestan district. Mid-January 2020, a group of 126 IDPs coming from Tala Wa Barfak district in the northern province of Baghlan found refuge in the provincial capital Mahmud-e Raqi.²⁰⁴⁰

In the beginning of April 2019, large displacement figures were reported in Nejrab district, due to changes in the security situation. Several areas of the district that were cleared by joined ANDSF operations in early December 2018 were recaptured by non-state armed forces. The displaced families found refuge in Nejrab district centre and in other secure districts within the province, such as Mahmud-e Raqi and Hisa-i Awal-e Kohistan.²⁰⁴¹ In December 2019 and January 2020, ongoing ANDSF clearing operations in Nejrab district were reported to have caused large numbers of displaced families to seek shelter in the district centre and in the provincial capital Mahmud-e Raqi.²⁰⁴²

According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Kapisa province resided in Mahmud-e Raqi and Tagab districts.²⁰⁴³ According to UNHCR, Kapisa is one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who originate there but choose to live somewhere else once they return.²⁰⁴⁴

²⁰³⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁴¹ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 2 April 2019, [url](#), p. 1

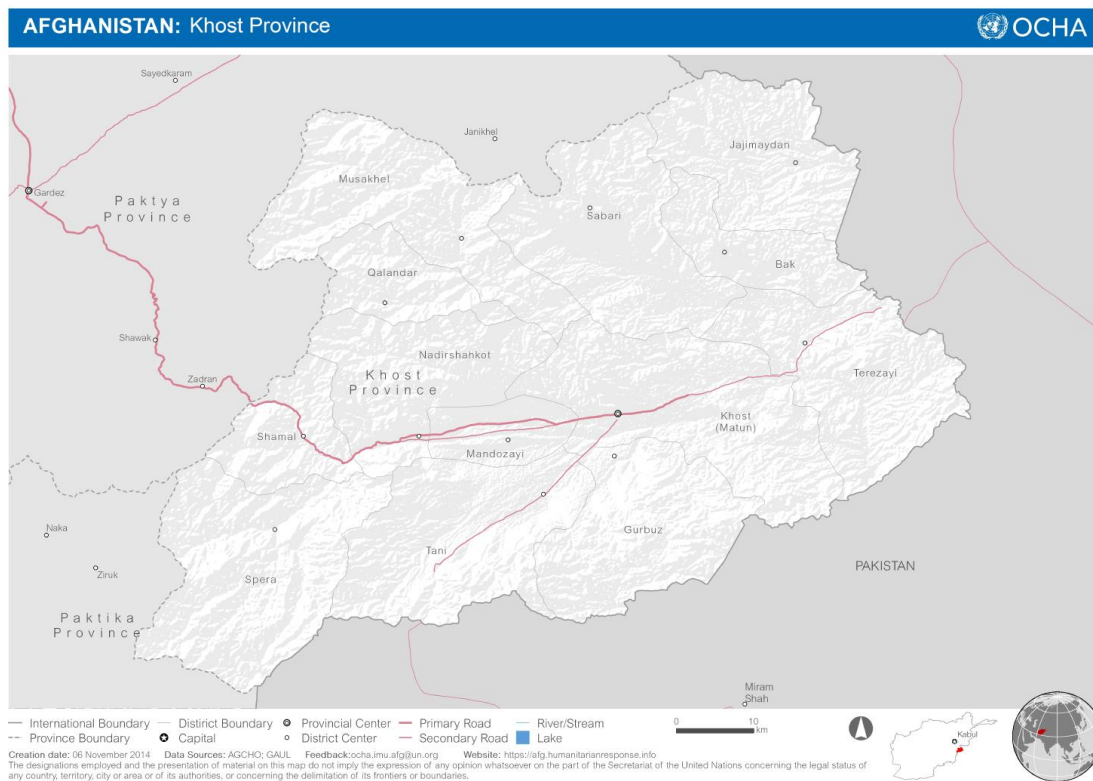
²⁰⁴² UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 29 January 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁰⁴³ IOM, Afghanistan - Kapisa Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 6; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) I June 2019 I Province: Kapisa, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁴ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report - Final Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

2.18 Khost

2.18.1 General description of the province



Map 18: Afghanistan – Khost province, source: UNOCHA²⁰⁴⁵

A part of Loya Paktya (i.e. 'Greater Paktya'), an area also encompassing the provinces of Paktya and Paktika²⁰⁴⁶, the province of Khost is situated in the eastern part of Afghanistan, bordering Pakistan to the east, Paktika to the south-west, and Paktya to the west and north-west.²⁰⁴⁷ Khost is divided into the following administrative units: Ali Sher (Terezayi), Bak, Gurbuz, Jajimaydan, Khost (Matun), Mandozayi (Esmayel Khel), Muzakhel, Nadirshahkot, Qalandar, Sabari (Yaqubi), Shamal, Spera, and Tani. The provincial capital of Khost is the city of Khost.²⁰⁴⁸

According to the NSIA, the population of Khost is estimated at 636 522 for 2020/21. The rural population accounts for 98 % of the total.²⁰⁴⁹ As stated by AAN founder Thomas Ruttig, Khost is part of one of the three major Pashtun regions of Afghanistan.²⁰⁵⁰ The province is primarily inhabited by Pashtuns, with approximately 1 % Tajik.²⁰⁵¹ US-bad Tribal Analysis Center (TAC) also mentioned the presence of other minorities (Sikh, Hazara) in Khost City.²⁰⁵² The province is inhabited by a large number of Pashtun tribes, among them the Zadran tribe, namesake of the so-called Zadran Arc, which includes

²⁰⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Khost Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁶ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 57

²⁰⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: South Eastern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁰⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Khost Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#), Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Khost, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 23

²⁰⁴⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²⁰⁵⁰ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 57

²⁰⁵¹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Khost Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰⁵² TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 8

stretches of western Khost, Paktya and Paktika.²⁰⁵³ In 2013, TAC described the Zadran as historically strong but also 'loose', characterized by infighting and multiple political affiliations.²⁰⁵⁴ Furthermore, Kuchi and Musalyan nomads are said to live in Khost seasonally.²⁰⁵⁵ According to Afghanistan expert Antonio Giustozzi, there were over 50 000 nomad families in Khost as of May 2019.²⁰⁵⁶ RFE/RL's Gandhara also pointed out that, from 2014 onwards, military operations in North Waziristan forced 7 000 families to seek shelter in Khost and Paktika.²⁰⁵⁷

In 2013, TAC described Khost as a '[...] major transit hub for trade from Pakistan [...]'.²⁰⁵⁸ Khost reportedly has three border crossings with Pakistan (Ghulam Khan, Babrak Tanai and Zazai Maidan).²⁰⁵⁹ The key border crossing of Ghulam Khan was closed in 2014 due to military operations in Pakistan's North Waziristan, reopened for trade activities in March 2018, and was fully reopened from August 2019. Since then, the residents of Paktya, Paktika and Khost are reportedly allowed to get into Pakistan with their *tazkera*, under the condition that they have relatives living on the other side of the Durand Line.²⁰⁶⁰ There is also an unofficial motorable crossing point to Pakistan in Jajimaydan district, which has been temporarily closed in the past as well.²⁰⁶¹

The so-called Khost-Gardez Pass connects Khost with neighbouring Paktya, Logar and ultimately Kabul.²⁰⁶² According to a 2017 report by the US-based news site ThinkProgress, the Khost-Logar road leads through areas with a strong Taliban presence and hence potential Taliban checkpoints in the provinces of Paktya and Logar.²⁰⁶³ In March 2019, the Afghan authorities announced that they were now in full control of the 50 kilometre-road linking Paktya's Dand Wa Patan district to Khost's Jajimaydan district. For the previous five years, the highway had been under the influence of the Taliban and the Haqqani Network.²⁰⁶⁴ In March 2019 as well, Tolonews reported that the Pakistani forces had closed the road connecting Khost City to Gurbuz district. Some villages of this district close to the border have been cut in two by the fencing of the border by the Pakistani military, which encroached on Afghan territory and deprived local population from access to public services.²⁰⁶⁵

According to the airport map produced by the Austrian COI department, an airport with scheduled passenger services does not exist in Khost.²⁰⁶⁶

The 2018 UNODC Opium Survey reported that Khost has been poppy-free at least since 2013.²⁰⁶⁷

²⁰⁵³ TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 8

²⁰⁵⁴ TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 8

²⁰⁵⁵ TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 9

²⁰⁵⁶ Giustozzi, A., Nomad-settler conflict in Afghanistan today, AREU, 13 November 2019, [url](#), p. 14

²⁰⁵⁷ RFE/RL/Gandhara, In Afghanistan, Lockdown Hits Waziristan Refugees Hard, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁵⁸ TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url](#), p. 9

²⁰⁵⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost market unaffected by closure of Pakistan border, 8 July 2016, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Af-Pak trade via Ghulam Khan route set to resume, 5 March 2018, [url](#); Sabawoon, A. M., The

Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁶¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost market unaffected by closure of Pakistan border, 8 July 2016, [url](#); Sabawoon, A. M., The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁶² iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#); NYT, Costly Afghanistan Road Project Is Marred by Unsavory Alliances, 1 May 2011, [url](#)

²⁰⁶³ ThinkProgress, Afghans fearful as CIA-backed militias patrol the ground and U.S. drones haunt the skies, 13 December 2017, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁴ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Hold 'Full Control' Of Key Highway In Southeast, 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁵ Tolonews, Durand Line Fencing Splits Afghan Families, 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁶⁶ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019, available upon request under <https://www.staatendokumentation.at/de/> (accessed by EASO on 25 March 2019)

²⁰⁶⁷ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

2.18.2 Conflict background and actors in Khost

In 2009, Thomas Ruttig noted that Loya Paktya – encompassing Khost – has never been a Taliban stronghold.²⁰⁶⁸ AAN stated in August 2018 that Khost ‘[...] features an active insurgency, but it remains somewhat curtailed by strong tribal affiliations and cohesive local communities’. It also noted that due to the geographical terrain of mountainous Khost, AGEs are largely dependent on the collaboration of locals, as ‘the sworn hostility of even a minor community can be a logistical nightmare for insurgents, as they have to rely on mountain routes or secrecy for the security of their movements and the success of their operations.’ AAN concluded that ‘this discourages acts that would antagonise whole communities.’²⁰⁶⁹

As of May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mawlawi Abdullah Hussaini, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the Taliban shadow governor in Khost. He was appointed after the ‘reshuffle’ of the Taliban government structure during the 2019-2020 winter, ahead of the 2020 fighting season. Mawlawi Qasam Farid was listed as the head of the military commission in Loya Paktya.²⁰⁷⁰ Moreover, Khost is one of the provinces where the UN Security Council observed ‘strong ties’ between the Taliban and organised criminal groups involved in heroin, hashish, pine nut traffics or local businesses extortion.²⁰⁷¹

The Haqqani Network has reportedly been most active in the ‘Zadran Arc’²⁰⁷², with its late founder Jalaluddin Haqqani being a member of the Zadran tribe.²⁰⁷³ The group is affiliated with the Taliban, though it declared itself independent from the Quetta Shura from 2007 to 2015.²⁰⁷⁴ Declassified US cables quoted by Associated Press (AP) stated that, contrary to other Taliban factions, the Haqqani Network ‘[...] functions more in the military area, and is not a force in setting Taliban political or social issues’²⁰⁷⁵, a perception seemingly shared by Ruttig.²⁰⁷⁶ The Haqqani Network reportedly maintains close ties to the Pakistani secret service ISI, as well as other Pakistani militant groups and Al Qaeda.²⁰⁷⁷

In June 2019, the UN Security Council stated that the Haqqani Network numbered between 1 800 and 2 000 fighters leading Taliban operations in Khost, Paktya and Paktika, with the help of Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants. The report added that in Loya Paktya, the network was holding all of the main shadow government positions (provincial governors and district governors).²⁰⁷⁸ As of May 2020, the Haqqani Network was said to plan a joint unit of 2 000 fighters with Al Qaeda, headed by Hafiz Azizuddin Haqqani in the operational zone encompassing Loya Paktya.²⁰⁷⁹ Over 2019 and 2020, the

²⁰⁶⁸ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktya’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), *Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field*, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 58

²⁰⁶⁹ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktya’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁰ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9, 12, 25, 27

²⁰⁷¹ UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 12

²⁰⁷² Ruttig, T., Loya Paktya’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), *Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field*, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 62

²⁰⁷³ AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁴ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, Landinfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), p. 9

²⁰⁷⁵ AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁶ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktya’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), *Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field*, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 73

²⁰⁷⁷ AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Loya Paktya’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), *Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field*, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), pp. 75-76; NYT, Costly Afghanistan Road Project Is Marred by Unsavory Alliances, 1 May 2011, [url](#)

²⁰⁷⁸ UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), pp. 17-18

²⁰⁷⁹ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 13

Afghan security forces led several operations against the Haqqani Network in Khost and notably killed twelve of its commanders in Sabari district.²⁰⁸⁰

In a May 2020 report, the UN Security Council listed Khost among the 12 provinces where Al Qaeda was supposed to be ‘covertly active’.²⁰⁸¹ UNAMA added that its main tasks consist in ‘training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring’.²⁰⁸²

In terms of presence of government security forces, Khost province is under the responsibility of the 203th ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.²⁰⁸³ In a 2020 report focused on locally-rooted security forces, AAN observed that the robust and ‘relatively egalitarian’ tribal structures of Loya Paktya and its tradition of local defence groups (arbaki) had contributed to ‘more instances of effective, less abusive forces’.²⁰⁸⁴

In 2015, the Washington Post listed the Khost Protection Force (KPF) as the most influential security actor in the province.²⁰⁸⁵ Foreign Policy described it as ‘the most prominent of several CIA-sponsored elite paramilitary forces along the porous border with Pakistan’, where it is charged with keeping the border secure and prevent the entry of terrorists in Khost but also in neighbouring provinces.²⁰⁸⁶ According to UNAMA, it operates outside of the regular military structure and without any legal basis in south-eastern Afghanistan since at least 2007, with frequent support from foreign military forces and the Afghan air force.²⁰⁸⁷ Headquartered at Camp Chapman, outside Khost City, the KPF manpower ranges between 3 000 and 10 000, plus a network of informants.²⁰⁸⁸ In its 2020 annual report, UNAMA expressed grave concern over the impunity that, despite occasional investigations led by the authorities, KPF members enjoy for abuses they commit (including executions, torture and arbitrary detentions), which contributes to ‘anti-government sentiment and spark protests among the civilian population’.²⁰⁸⁹

According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, Gurbuz, Jajimaydan, Muzakhel, Nadirshahkot, Qalandar, Sabari, Spera, Tere Zayi districts are assessed as ‘contested’, while Bak, Khost, Mandozay, Shamal and Tani are listed as government-controlled or undetermined.²⁰⁹⁰ However, in April 2020, French daily newspaper Libération stated that Sabari district was under Taliban control.²⁰⁹¹ In a regional overview, ACLED reported that in July 2019, the Taliban had taken over areas of Jajimaydan district.²⁰⁹² At last, a survey published in June 2019 by Tolonews noted that due to insecurity, the Afghan administration was not able to rule one of Khost districts (unspecified) and was working remotely.²⁰⁹³

²⁰⁸⁰ Tolonews, 12 Haqqani Network Commanders Killed In Khost, 11 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost: 20 crime suspects arrested in a week, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁸¹ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 12

²⁰⁸² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 85-86

²⁰⁸³ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

²⁰⁸⁴ Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN & Global Public Policy Institute, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 46-47

²⁰⁸⁵ Washington Post (The), CIA runs shadow war with Afghan militia implicated in civilian killings, 3 December 2015, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁶ FP, How the CIA Aims to Keep a Footprint in Afghanistan, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 53, 57

²⁰⁸⁸ HRW, “They’ve Shot Many Like This” Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁸⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 9, 58, 64-65

²⁰⁹⁰ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., [url](#) However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

²⁰⁹¹ Libération, Naître et donner la vie en pays pachtoun [To be born and to give life in Pashtun country], 11 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁹² ACLED, Regional Overview-Asia, 31 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁹³ Tolonews, 64 Administrative Units Partially Paralyzed In 19 Provinces, 30 June 2019, [url](#)

2.18.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.18.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 197 civilian casualties (51 deaths and 146 injured) in Khost. This represents an increase of 13 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were non-suicide IEDs, followed by targeted/deliberate killings and ground engagements.²⁰⁹⁴ Resolute Support recorded between 76 and 125 civilian casualties in Khost in the first half of 2020, reporting a very marked increase during the second quarter compared to the first.²⁰⁹⁵

With regard to the severity of the conflict, over the full year 2019, Resolute Support recorded less than 150 enemy-initiated attacks in Khost province, as in 2018 – one of the five provinces with the lowest numbers.²⁰⁹⁶ In March 2020, a resident of Spera district told AAN that since the eight-days ‘reduction in violence’ period in February 2020, the situation was calm, with only ‘minor conflicts’ not resulting in any casualty. Local dwellers were now free to travel, but the government agents and NGO personnel were still wary of the Taliban.²⁰⁹⁷ In Khost City, the security situation was also said to be better than the usual at this time of year.²⁰⁹⁸ However, in May 2020, RFE/RL’s Gandhara observed that ‘the security situation [had] been deteriorating’ in the previous weeks.²⁰⁹⁹

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED collected data on 342 violent events in Khost province from open sources: 196 coded as ‘battles’ (57 %), 130 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ (38 %) and 16 as ‘violence against civilians’ (5 %).²¹⁰⁰

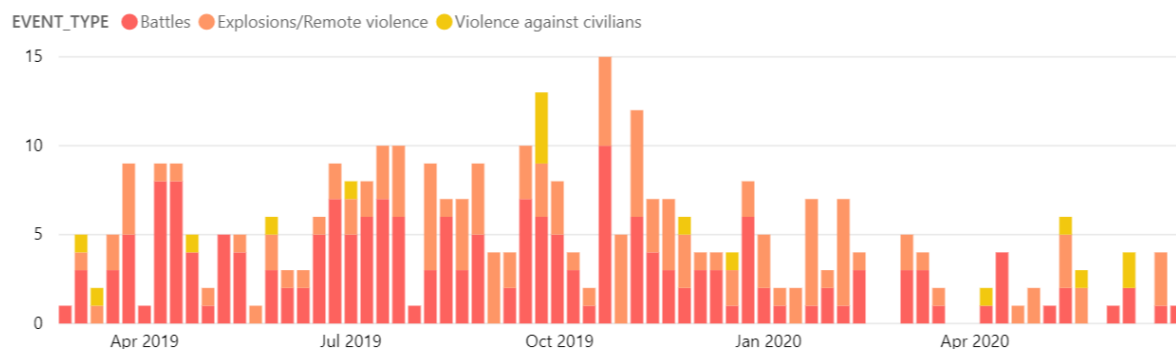


Figure 20. Khost - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data²¹⁰¹

Across these three categories, Sabari (66 incidents) and Khost (64) stood out as the districts where most violent events were reported between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. In Bak, Mandozayi, Muzakhel, Nadirshahkot, Qalandar and Spera, the number of such incidents ranged between 17 and

²⁰⁹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

²⁰⁹⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69 ; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72 At the time of writing, UNAMA provincial data for 2020 was not available.

²⁰⁹⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 69

²⁰⁹⁷ AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁹⁸ 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](#)

²⁰⁹⁹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Mosque Attacks Kill 13 Worshippers Breaking Fast, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Khost ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#) For more information on ACLED’s methodology, see: Introduction – Sources.

²¹⁰¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Khost ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

35. Based on ACLED data, the least affected districts were Gurbuz (3 events), Jajimaydan (4), Tani (4) and Shamal (7).²¹⁰²

Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, an overwhelming majority of them were ‘armed clashes’. Sabari, Muzakhel, Terezayi and Nadirshakot were the most affected districts by this type of violence. Conversely, Shamal, Mandozayi, Jajimaydan, Tani and Gurbuz recorded less than six armed clashes each. The remaining districts experienced levels of clashes ranging from 12 to 17. Of the 189 armed clashes that ACLED collected information about, 165 were said to have been initiated by the Taliban, and 2 others by them or an unidentified group. According to ACLED data, Taliban attacks mainly focused on Sabari, Muzakhel, Terezayi and Nadirshakot districts and only targeted ANDSF. As for the 22 armed clashes initiated by the Afghan security forces and allied militias, they were spread out across six districts, with a peak of nine attacks in Sabari in May - July 2019.²¹⁰³

Examples of such incidents include the killing by ANDSF of 16 Taliban militants in June 2019 and 21 others while repelling an attack in June 2020, both in Muzakhel district.²¹⁰⁴ In May 2020, Pajhwok reported that the provincial chief of police had been killed by a Taliban-initiated blast in Nadirshakot district, while he was travelling to a local police checkpoint attacked by the Taliban.²¹⁰⁵ Throughout 2019 and 2020, the Afghan security forces have led several operations against the Haqqani Network in Khost, resulting in the killing of twelve of its commanders in Sabari district, in June 2019, and the arrest of six fighters in May 2020.²¹⁰⁶ UNAMA expressed concern over Pakistan-initiated cross-border incidents in Kunar, Zabul and Khost provinces, which caused 39 child casualties (8 killed, 31 injured).²¹⁰⁷

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, the most represented sub-category was clearly ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’ (78 %). All these incidents were attributed to AGEs, particularly to the Taliban, although they have claimed none of the explosions reported to target civilians. Khost City district stood out as the most affected district by episodes of remote violence (43 events out of 130).²¹⁰⁸ For instance, in July 2019, two civilians were killed, and thirty others were wounded when a motorcycle bomb targeted a KPF convoy in the eastern part of Khost City.²¹⁰⁹ In other districts, several civilians were killed by explosives in Tani and Sabari, in November 2019.²¹¹⁰ On 17 December 2019, at least 10 civilians were killed (including 3 children), and at least 18 people were wounded in Ali Sher (Terezayi) district when explosives attached to a bicycle detonated near a police vehicle.²¹¹¹ On 2 March 2020, three civilians were killed and eleven injured when a bomb exploded during a football match in Nadirshakot district. Although they denied it, the Taliban were suspected

²¹⁰² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Khost ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²¹⁰³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Khost ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²¹⁰⁴ Khaama Press, Afghan forces killed, wound 34 Taliban militants in Khost, Pakiya: 203rd Thunder Corps, 13 July 2019, [url](#); Reporterly, Over 40 Taliban Killed By Afghan Forces, 30 June 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost police chief killed in roadside blast, 8 May 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁶ Tolonews, 12 Haqqani Network Commanders Killed In Khost, 11 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost: 20 crime suspects arrested in a week, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁰⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 21-22

²¹⁰⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Khost ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²¹⁰⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25- Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](#)

²¹¹⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

²¹¹¹ AP, Roadside bombing kills 10 civilians in Afghanistan, 17 December 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Children among 10 killed as Taliban IED goes off in Khost province, 17 December 2019, [url](#); TRTWorld, Roadside bombing kills 10 civilians in Afghanistan - official, 17 December 2019, [url](#)

to have planned the attack.²¹¹² In April 2020, an unclaimed bomb exploded along the convoy of provincial governor Hamil Fidai, who survived.²¹¹³

Also coded as 'Explosions/Remote violence' by ACLED, ten air/drone strikes were recorded across six districts of the province, most of them in Khost, Nadirshahkot, Sabari and Terezayi (Ali Sher).²¹¹⁴ In the latter, on 28 November 2019, five civilians were killed when a US drone targeted a car carrying a woman who had just given birth, prompting the US forces and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission to launch investigations.²¹¹⁵

As for episodes of violence against civilians, based on ACLED data, none of the districts registered more than four incidents, Khost and Sabari being relatively more affected.²¹¹⁶ In Sabari, two unclaimed shootings against worshipers praying in mosques resulted in four deaths overall in May 2020.²¹¹⁷ Other incidents included the shooting of a local TV journalist, in March 2019, for which 'an Islamic State affiliate' claimed responsibility.²¹¹⁸ While expressing concern over reported cases of summary executions, unlawful and arbitrary detentions and of torture by the KPF, UNAMA noted that the 25 civilian deaths attributed to the KPF across Khost, Paktya and Paktika in 2019 represented a 'significant drop' from 2018 and that all of them had been reported during the first quarter of 2019 alone.²¹¹⁹

Incidentally, in June 2020, in Mandozayi district, invoking an ancient tribal custom, hundreds of members of the Mangal tribe burned several houses of a family accused of having killed seven members of another family two days earlier.²¹²⁰

2.18.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 2 828 persons displaced from Khost – one of the lowest provincial figures recorded over the period. All of them found refuge in the provincial capital's district.²¹²¹ Overall, the main district of origin of IDPs was Sabari (1 750), accounting for 62 % of Khost total numbers. It is distantly followed by Bak (308) and Nadirshahkot (259). The highest displacement figures were recorded in April and October 2019, and January-February 2020. Since then, UNOCHA has not reported any displacement.²¹²² According to several UNOCHA reports, ongoing conflict appeared to be the main cause of displacement.²¹²³

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 3 619 persons displaced to Khost. Aside from the 2 828 people displaced within the province, 301 IDPs came from

²¹¹² RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Ends Partial Truce As Deadly Bombing Hits Near Soccer Ground, 2 March 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Blast in Khost Kills Three Civilians: Mol, 2 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, U.S. Announces Troop Withdrawal in Afghanistan as Respite From Violence Ends, 2 March 2020, [url](#)

²¹¹³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Attacks Across Afghanistan Kill Dozens Of Security Force Members [Source : AFP], Civilians, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

²¹¹⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Khost; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²¹¹⁵ NYT, U.S. Drone Killed Afghan Civilians, Officials Say, 1 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, US forces, AIHRC probing Khost drone strike, 1 December 2019, [url](#)

²¹¹⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Khost; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²¹¹⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Mosque Attacks Kill 13 Worshipers Breaking Fast, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

²¹¹⁸ AP, Taliban kill 22 Afghan forces in attack on checkpoints, 17 March 2019, [url](#)

²¹¹⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 9, 57-58, 64-65

²¹²⁰ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Tribe Burns Down Houses Of Alleged Murderers In Southeast Afghanistan, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

²¹²¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

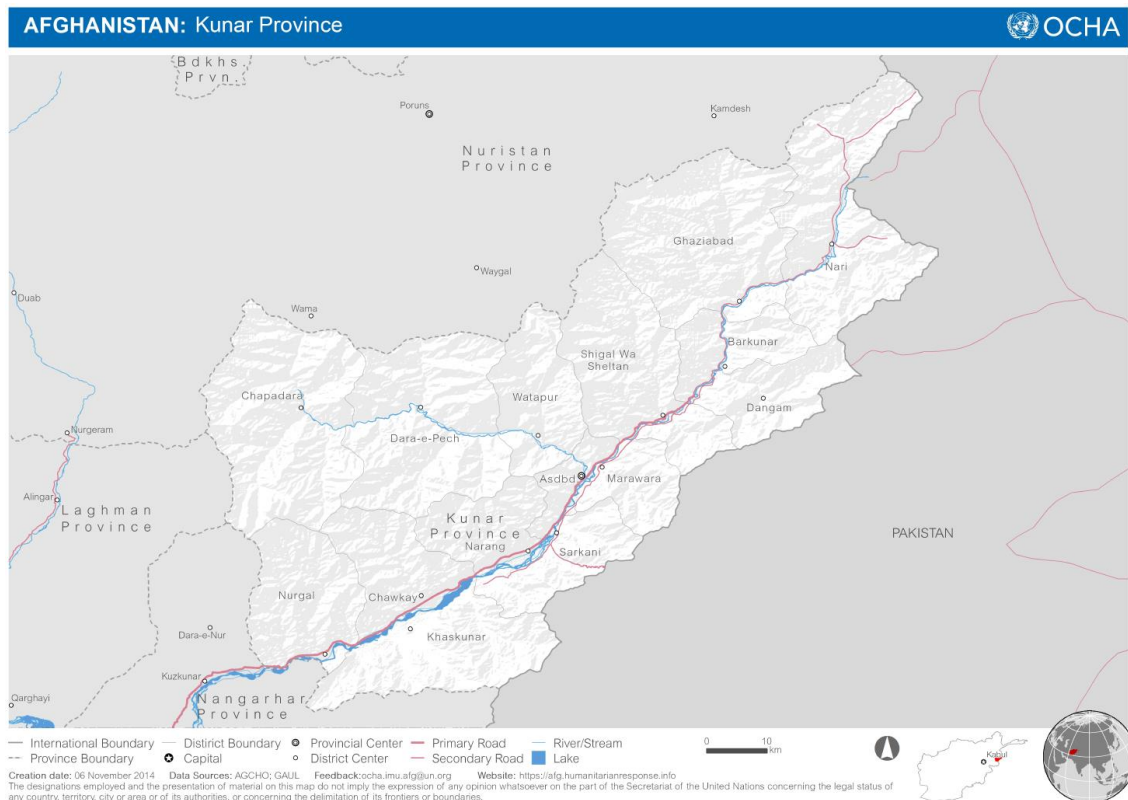
²¹²² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²¹²³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October – 3 November 2019), 6 November 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January – 2 February 2020), 3 February 2020, [url](#)

Paktika, 231 from Logar, 189 from Paktya and 70 from Nangarhar. Khost City's district turned out to be the only destination of these IDPs.²¹²⁴

2.19 Kunar

2.19.1 General description of the province



Map 19: Afghanistan – Kunar province, source: UNOCHA²¹²⁵

Kunar is located in eastern Afghanistan, along the Afghan-Pakistani border; it borders Nuristan to the north, Pakistan to the east, Nangarhar to the south, and Laghman to the west.²¹²⁶ The province is divided into the following administrative units: Asadabad, Barkunar (also Asmar), Chapadara, Chawkay (also Sawkay), Dangam, Dara-e-Pech (also Manogi), Ghaziabad, Khashkunar, Marawara, Narang, Nari, Nurgal, Sarkani, Shigal, Watapur and Sheltan.²¹²⁷ AAN defined the latter as a 'temporary district', meaning that it is considered to belong to Kunar province, but its status as such has not been approved by the Afghan parliament yet.²¹²⁸ The provincial capital is Asadabad.²¹²⁹

²¹²⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²¹²⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²¹²⁶ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²¹²⁷ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Kunar, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 24; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²¹²⁸ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

²¹²⁹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunar, n. d., [url](#)

According to NSIA, the population of Kunar is estimated at 499 393 for 2020/21. The rural population accounts for about 97 % of the total.²¹³⁰ It is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Pashai and Nuristani.²¹³¹ The province has been affected by high rates of illegal logging, mining and smuggling by militants, mafia groups, local strongmen and, allegedly, some government officials, contributing to the devastation of Kunar's dense forests. The illegal mining of precious stones in Manogi and Chapadara districts provides jobs to hundreds of people and, in April 2020, was said to be increasing.²¹³²

The national highway 'NH01' starts from Jalalabad, passes through the districts of Nurgal, Chawkey, Narang, Asadabad, Shigal and leads to Asmar.²¹³³ From Asmar, the highway leads to Nuristan province through Ghaziabad and Nari districts. Blocked in 2017 by insurgents, it was reopened by ANDSF in August 2018 after a series of operations.²¹³⁴ According to an Afghan soldier interviewed by French newspaper Libération, the government also retook control of the road leading to Chapadara district through Dara-e Pech, formerly known as a 'death trap', in early 2019.²¹³⁵ In September 2019, it was reported that after five years of closure, the Nawapas Highway, which is located in Sarkani district and crosses into Pakistan at the unofficial Nawapas border point, had been cleared from the Taliban.²¹³⁶ However, in September 2019, UNOCHA reported that militant groups were blocking unspecified highways in Kunar.²¹³⁷

The province shares a 175 kilometre-long border with Pakistan; through the Korengal valley, which lies west of the provincial capital; insurgents have been entering and leaving the province for years.²¹³⁸ In June 2020, Pakistani forces have been accused of encroaching on Afghan territory while building a fence along the border in Kunar.²¹³⁹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, opium-poppy cultivation levels in Kunar (1 723 hectares) remained similar to 2017 (1 634 hectares), representing a 6 % increase in poppy cultivation.²¹⁴⁰

2.19.2 Conflict background and actors in Kunar

In February 2020, a security analyst interviewed by Sweden's Lifos described Kunar as 'strongly controlled/influenced' by the Taliban.²¹⁴¹ As of May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mawalawi Hamdullah Uruzgani, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the Taliban shadow governor of Kunar. He was appointed after the 'reshuffle' of the Taliban government structure during the 2019-2020 winter, ahead of the 2020 fighting season.²¹⁴² By December 2019, according to the provincial vice-governor, about 1 000 militants, most of them former members of the Taliban, had

²¹³⁰ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²¹³¹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#), Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunar, n. d., [url](#)

²¹³² IWPR, Illegal Logging Destroying Afghan Forests, 23 January 2018, [url](#); RFE/RL/Gandhara, Precious Stones Illegally Mined In Afghan Province, 24 April 2020, [url](#); FP, Afghanistan's Forests are Turning a Profit for the Islamic State, 15 July 2019, [url](#)

²¹³³ Italy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Evaluation Report - Afghanistan: Rehabilitation of Maidan Shar – Bamyān Road, 2014, [url](#), p. 8; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²¹³⁴ Salaam Times, Afghan forces reopen key Kunar highway blocked by Taliban, 9 August 2018, [url](#)

²¹³⁵ Libération, Afghanistan : mon voisin, ce taliban devenu fréquentable [Afghanistan : my neighbour, this Taliban guy who has become reputable], 3 February 2020, [url](#)

²¹³⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunar's Nawapas road reopens after 5-year closure, 7 September 2019, [url](#); Sabawoon, A. M., The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, [url](#)

²¹³⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 – 29 September 2019), 2 October 2019, [url](#)

²¹³⁸ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²¹³⁹ Tolonews, 'Pakistani Forces Building Facilities on Afghan Soil': Residents, 8 June 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁰ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 23

²¹⁴¹ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (version 2.0.), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 41

²¹⁴² UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9, 27

reportedly enrolled in a NDS-sponsored ‘Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration’ program in Kunar.²¹⁴³

As of May 2020, Kunar was one of the 12 provinces where Al Qaeda was said to be ‘covertly active’. The UN Security Council mentioned in the same report that the group intended to form a joint unit of 2 000 fighters with the Haqqani Network, headed by Shir Khan Manga in the operational zone composed of Kunar and Nuristan.²¹⁴⁴ UNAMA added that Al Qaeda’s main tasks consist in ‘training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring’.²¹⁴⁵ Besides, in March 2020, Kunar officials expressed concern about the recruitment by Al Qaeda of former Taliban fighters hostile to the negotiations between the movement and the USA.²¹⁴⁶ Long War Journal also mentioned the presence in Kunar and Nuristan provinces of a commander affiliated to both the Taliban and Al Qaeda, Qari Zia Rahman.²¹⁴⁷

As of July 2020, the Afghan branch of the Islamic State, ISKP, was said to be headed by Sheikh Matiullah Kamahwal, former leader of the Kunar chapter.²¹⁴⁸ During the first half of 2019, ISKP appeared to gain territory in the province²¹⁴⁹, which had already been described as one its strongholds in Afghanistan in February 2019.²¹⁵⁰ However, from the fall of 2019, military operations simultaneously led by ANDSF, coalition forces and the Taliban pressured ISKP into leaving the areas under its control in southern Nangarhar and in Kunar.²¹⁵¹ Although the group endured further losses in Kunar in early 2020²¹⁵², the UN Secretary General stated that the province had ‘effectively become the group’s new Afghan core areas’.²¹⁵³ Between January and May 2020, sources reported the presence of ISKP fighters or bases in western parts of the province: in remote areas of Chawkey district, where the dense forests provide quality hideouts²¹⁵⁴, in Narang, Nurgal and Chapadara²¹⁵⁵, as well as in Watapur and Dara-e Pech districts.²¹⁵⁶ Estimates of the total number of ISKP fighters in Kunar oscillated between 400 (half of them in Chapadara), as reported by the Diplomat in August 2019²¹⁵⁷, 1 200, according to the provincial governor in January 2020²¹⁵⁸, and 2 100, as stated by the UN Secretary General in February 2020.²¹⁵⁹

²¹⁴³ Le Figaro, Afghanistan: un programme gouvernemental pour réintégrer des talibans repentis [Afghanistan : a government program to reinstate repentant Taliban], 26 December 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁴ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 12-13

²¹⁴⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 85-86

²¹⁴⁶ Tolonews, Al-Qaeda Recruiting Disaffected Taliban: Kunar Officials, 12 March 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁷ LWJ, Female Pakistani Taliban suicide bomber hits hospital, 21 July 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁴⁸ UN Security Council, Letter dated 16 July 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, 23 July 2020, [url](#), p. 15

²¹⁴⁹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Islamic State In Afghanistan Growing Bigger, More Dangerous, 22 May 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁰ UN Secretary-General, Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 1 February 2019, [url](#), p. 7

²¹⁵¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security & Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 28

²¹⁵² UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 3

²¹⁵³ UN Secretary-General, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7

²¹⁵⁴ UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 18

²¹⁵⁵ Tolonews, More Than 1,000 Daesh Fighters Active In Kunar: Governor, 8 January 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁶ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangrahar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁷ Diplomat (The), The Peculiar Presence of the Islamic State in Kunar, 14 May 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁸ Tolonews, More Than 1,000 Daesh Fighters Active In Kunar: Governor, 8 January 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁵⁹ UNSG, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 7

Local ISKP ranks were bolstered by the arrival of about 350 fighters – including foreign nationals – pushed out of neighbouring Nangarhar by ANDSF and Taliban operations.²¹⁶⁰

In an article published by the magazine *The Diplomat*, Afghanistan-based journalist Franz J. Marty noted that, according to ‘anecdotal evidence’, ‘some alleged Islamic State fighters in Kunar have simply adopted a vague, locally-colored version of the Islamic State’, sometimes for opportunistic reasons or ideological compatibility, since many Kunar residents are Salafists.²¹⁶¹ In this regard, in January 2020, *Foreign Policy* reported that in both Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, some Salafist madrasas, funded by Gulf states-based NGOs, were supporting ISKP activities.²¹⁶²

In 2017, sources mentioned the presence of a group of Hezb-e Islami militants based in Shigal district. At that time, they were reportedly communicating with other insurgent groups but had neither joined the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, nor ISKP.²¹⁶³

In a June 2019 report, the UN Security Council listed Kunar as one of the border areas where ‘many foreign terrorist fighter groups operate and have established safe havens’. Of these groups, Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LeT) was said to be ‘one of more prominent’ and ‘a key facilitator in recruitment and financial support activities’. It reportedly numbers about 500 active members in Kunar and Nangarhar, and is thought to have adopted a ‘more neutral role’ towards the Taliban and ISKP, from which it distanced itself.²¹⁶⁴ As of May 2020, LeT fighters were ‘dispersed within Taliban forces’.²¹⁶⁵ Another active group is Jaish-e Mohammed (JeM). As LeT, it is said to help terrorist fighters to enter Afghanistan and to carry out targeted assassinations, notably against government officials.²¹⁶⁶ Up to 2018 at least, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) ran a military base, called Ghazi Camp, in Kunar.²¹⁶⁷ It reportedly numbered 500 fighters in the province as of May 2020.²¹⁶⁸ Finally, as of July 2020, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) was supposedly present in Afghanistan, mainly in three provinces, among which Kunar.²¹⁶⁹

In terms of presence of government security forces, Kunar province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under the Train, Advise, and Assist Command – East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.²¹⁷⁰ According to AAN, Kunar is often listed as one of the provinces where the ALP is working well. Indeed, whereas it was one of the most violent provinces, the ALP and other ANDSF corps were able to stabilise the situation after the withdrawal of international forces.²¹⁷¹

The NDS-04, a unit of the NDS paramilitary strike forces, operates in Nuristan, Kunar and other provinces in the North-East. In a 2019 report, Human Rights Watch explained that, although they are technically subordinated to the NDS, these forces are trained, equipped and overseen by the CIA. They conduct brutal night raids, targeting alleged insurgents and often injuring or killing civilians. These

²¹⁶⁰ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 17

²¹⁶¹ *Diplomat* (The), *The Peculiar Presence of the Islamic State in Kunar*, 14 May 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁶² FP, *In Afghanistan, Religious Schools Are a Breeding Ground for Islamic State Influence*, 24 January 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁶³ *Diplomat* (The), *Afghan Jihad Frozen in Time?*, 25 April 2017, [url](#); USIP, *The Political Deal with Hezb-e Islami*, 6 July 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁶⁴ UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), pp. 17-18

²¹⁶⁵ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 20

²¹⁶⁶ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 20

²¹⁶⁷ LWJ, *US hits Pakistani Taliban training camp in eastern Afghanistan*, 8 March 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁶⁸ UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 20

²¹⁶⁹ UNSG, Letter dated 16 July 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, 23 July 2020, [url](#), p. 16

²¹⁷⁰ USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

²¹⁷¹ Clark, K. et al., *Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future*, AAN & Global Public Policy Institute, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 46, 93

operations have grown increasingly frequent since late 2017.²¹⁷² According to AAN's Kate Clark, in 2017, the NDS-04 unit numbered 250 men.²¹⁷³ However, another AAN report stated that Kunar was actually the operation field of the NDS-02 Special forces unit.²¹⁷⁴

In April 2020, RFE/RL's Gandhara reported that the Taliban and other AGEs controlled 'large swathes of rural territories' in Kunar province.²¹⁷⁵ According to information LWJ collected and presented in a map, all of Kunar districts are assessed as contested by the Afghan government and the Taliban, except for Asadabad district (presented as undetermined or government-controlled) and Chapadara (presented as Taliban-controlled, based on 2017 information).²¹⁷⁶ Regarding Chapadara, in May 2019, the Diplomat described the situation as 'calm'. Its main valley was then controlled by the government, while ISKP had ousted the Taliban from two others valleys, Lindalam and Digal, in March 2019.²¹⁷⁷ As of August 2019, government forces were said to be 'in full control' of the Pech valley area, encompassing districts of Watapur, Dara-e Pech and Chapadara, despite sporadic AGEs attacks.²¹⁷⁸ In September 2019, on the eve of the presidential election, the Taliban retook parts of Manroo (equated with Marawara by AAN²¹⁷⁹) district that they had lost to ISKP six months earlier.²¹⁸⁰

2.19.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.19.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 256 civilian casualties (77 deaths and 179 injured) in Kunar. This represents a decrease of 36 % compared to 2018. Indeed, while UNAMA noticed an increase in the number of incidents attributed to ISKP (such as IED discoveries, detonations and armed clashes) in Kunar and two other provinces, there were fewer civilian casualties connected to ground engagements initiated by ISKP, resulting in a 'significant decrease' in this type of casualties in Nangarhar and Kunar over 2019. However, ground engagements remained the leading cause of casualties, followed by explosive remnants of war and targeted/deliberate killings.²¹⁸¹ Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Kunar in the first half of 2020, reporting a decrease during the second quarter compared to the first.²¹⁸²

In terms of severity of the conflict, Resolute Support recorded between 501 and 1 000 enemy-initiated attacks in Kunar province over the full year 2019, in line with 2018.²¹⁸³ In March 2020, AAN reported that after the end of the 'reduction in violence' period, in the build-up to the US/Taliban agreement, provincial capital Asadabad had remained secure, while fighting had resumed in the districts – for instance, between the Taliban and ISKP in Watapur district.²¹⁸⁴

²¹⁷² HRW, "They've Shot Many Like This" Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁷³ Clark, K., CIA-proxy militias, CIA-drones in Afghanistan: "Hunt and kill" déjà vu, AAN, 26 October 2017, [url](#)

²¹⁷⁴ Ruttig, T., "Murder Is Always": The Kulalgo night raid killings, AAN, 17 August 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁷⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Precious Stones Illegally Mined In Afghan Province, 24 April 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁷⁶ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., [url](#) However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

²¹⁷⁷ Diplomat (The), The Peculiar Presence of the Islamic State in Kunar, 14 May 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁷⁸ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Peace Returns To Afghanistan's 'Valley Of Death', 22 August 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁷⁹ Ruttig, T., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (19): An ambiguous picture of E-day civilian casualties, AAN, 17 October 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁸⁰ VoA, In One Afghan Province, the Taliban Safe-Guarded the Elections, 8 October 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁸¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 36, 69, 94

²¹⁸² SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69 ; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72 At the time of writing, UNAMA provincial data for 2020 was not available.

²¹⁸³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 69

²¹⁸⁴ AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, [url](#)

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED collected data on 271 violent events in Kunar province from open sources: 164 coded as ‘battles’ (61 %), 100 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ (37 %) and 7 as ‘violence against civilians’ (2 %).²¹⁸⁵

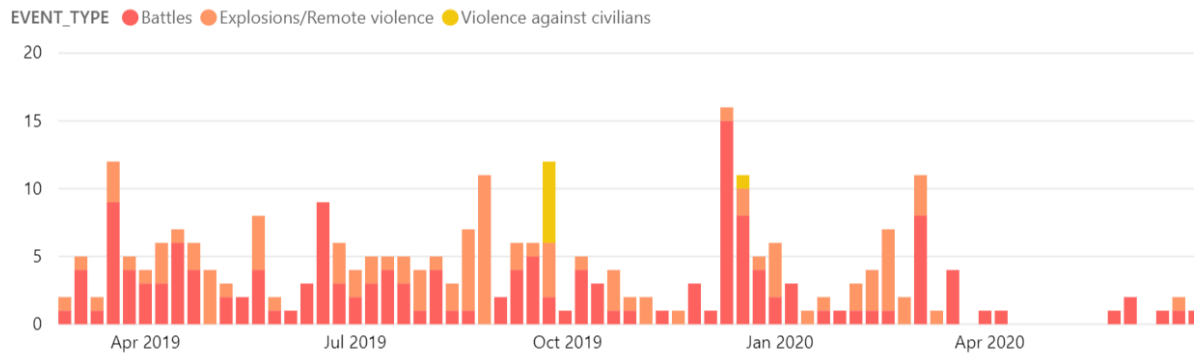


Figure 21. Kunar - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data²¹⁸⁶

Across these three categories, Sarkani (55 incidents), Dara-e Pech (41) and Chawkay (33) stood out as the districts where most violent incidents were reported between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, accounting for half of the total number. ACLED also recorded between 10 and 21 violent events in Barkunar, Chapadara, Dangam, Ghaziabad, Marawara and Nurgal districts, and less than 10 for the remaining districts (including in Asadabad, home to the provincial capital – 7 incidents).²¹⁸⁷

Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, about 80 % were ‘armed clashes’. They mainly took place in Sarkani district (42 out of 124), with Ghaziabad being a distant second (15). Out of all of the documented clashes, 82 were assessed by ACLED as initiated by the Taliban, almost entirely against ANDSF and, throughout the reporting period, mainly in Sarkani district.²¹⁸⁸

Taliban-ISKP clashes were also reported in late March and June 2019 in Chapadara and Dare-e Pech districts, forcing two health centres to close in the former.²¹⁸⁹ In March 2020, the Taliban claimed to have cleared the whole province of ISKP, although US military sources stated that ANDSF and coalition forces had also contributed to ISKP defeat.²¹⁹⁰ According to French newspaper Le Figaro, Afghan official sources denied that ANDSF and the Taliban had led joint military operations against ISKP. However, the ANDSF are thought to have toned down their attacks on the Taliban, allowing both of them to focus on the fighting against their common enemy.²¹⁹¹

²¹⁸⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#) For more information on ACLED’s methodology, see: Introduction – Sources.

²¹⁸⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²¹⁸⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²¹⁸⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²¹⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Kunar Conflict – Update (as of 3 April 2019), 4 April 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Heavy clashes underway between Taliban, ISIS militants in two districts of Kunar, 22 June 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁰ VoA, US Admits Taliban Offensive Is Whittling IS’s Grip on Afghanistan, 20 March 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁹¹ Le Figaro, Afghanistan: à Taranak, l’alliance secrète des talibans et de l’armée contre l’État islamique [In Taranak, the Taliban and the army’s secret alliance against the Islamic State], 31 January 2020, [url](#)

The 38 ANDSF-initiated clashes were spread out across 12 districts, with a peak of 5 in Nurgal²¹⁹², where 11 Taliban were killed in May 2019.²¹⁹³ In early 2020, several raids were conducted against ISKP in Chawkay and Nurgal districts.²¹⁹⁴ ACLED data also highlight the territorial gains made throughout December 2019 in Dara-e Pech district by Afghan military forces, with numerous attacks launched against the Taliban and ISKP.²¹⁹⁵

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, the most represented subcategory was ANDSF-initiated ‘Air/drone strikes’ (about two thirds of the 88 reported incidents).²¹⁹⁶ Most of them targeted AGEs in Chawkay district, where, for instance, five ISKP fighters were killed in November 2019.²¹⁹⁷

ACLED also listed 21 ‘Shelling/artillery/missile attacks’, which included several cross-border incidents initiated by the Pakistani military forces.²¹⁹⁸ In August 2019, local officials quoted by Khaama Press stated that during the previous months, Pakistani forces had fired over 700 shells and mortar rounds on Kunar, most of them landing in Sheltan district.²¹⁹⁹ On 26 September 2019, three children were killed when a mosque collapsed in Dangam district after the Pakistani army allegedly fired more than 180 rockets into Kunar.²²⁰⁰ In October 2019, another Pakistani shelling killed three women in Nari district.²²⁰¹ Overall, in 2019, UNAMA recorded 65 civilian casualties due to cross-border incidents, as well as damages to property and livestock. Out of the 29 recorded incidents involving civilian casualties, a majority took place in Kunar.²²⁰²

Most of the seven violent events against civilians documented by ACLED were disruptions caused by the Taliban to the presidential election across the province²²⁰³, notably in Dangam and Barkunar districts, where they attacked polling centres. Overall, seven civilians were wounded in these attacks.²²⁰⁴ However, in Manroo district (equated with Marawara by AAN²²⁰⁵), where ISKP had threatened civilians who would take part to the voting process, the Taliban actually ensured the safety of the voters.²²⁰⁶

²¹⁹² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²¹⁹³ Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces kill 11 Taliban fighters in Kunar province, 22 May 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁴ Khaama Press, 19 ISIS militants killed in Afghan Special Forces raid, airstrikes in Kapisa and Kunar, 21 February 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Airstrikes, Special Forces raid kill 6 ISIS militants in East of Afghanistan, 18 February 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, U.S. airstrike kills 7 ISIS militants in Kunar province of Afghanistan, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²¹⁹⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²¹⁹⁷ Khaama Press, Airstrikes kill 13 ISIS militants in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces of Afghanistan, 9 November 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁹⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²¹⁹⁹ Khaama Press, Shelling by Pakistani military kill, wound 9 Afghan children in Kunar, 28 August 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰¹ Tolonews, 3 Afghan Women Killed In Pakistani Shelling: Officials, 28 October 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 72, 119

²²⁰³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²²⁰⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 4-5

²²⁰⁵ Ruttig, T., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (19): An ambiguous picture of E-day civilian casualties, AAN, 17 October 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰⁶ VoA, In One Afghan Province, the Taliban Safe-Guarded the Elections, 8 October 2019, [url](#)

UNAMA documented cases of abduction of children by the Taliban, in Marawara (March 2019) and Watapur (October 2019) districts. They were held captive for up to two weeks.²²⁰⁷

Although, in April 2019, Kunar was listed among the provinces where the Taliban most disrupted the polio vaccination campaigns²²⁰⁸, in August 2019, a four-years long ban on immunization services was lifted in Nurgal district²²⁰⁹, while UNOCHA mentioned the reopening of several health centres that had been kept closed for an undefined period in Ghaziabad and Digal districts.²²¹⁰ In March and April 2020, the Taliban abducted and held captive seven health workers overall, in Chapadara and Marawara districts, reportedly accusing them of failing to provide adequate services to the local population.²²¹¹

In March 2020, the security forces reportedly arrested – then released – a journalist for having questioned the management of funds allocated to the COVID-19 response.²²¹²

2.19.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 58 043 persons displaced from Kunar – the second highest provincial numbers recorded over the period. While over 45 000 IDPs found refuge within the province, more than 11 000 were headed to neighbouring Nangarhar and Nuristan, and 680 to Kabul province.²²¹³ Chapadara district alone accounted for 28 898 of Kunar's IDPs. Of them, over 25 000 were displaced in March 2019²²¹⁴, due to clashes between ISKP and the Taliban.²²¹⁵ In early April 2019, UNOCHA noted that overall, half of the population of Chapadara had been forced to flee the area and relocated in nearby Taliban-controlled areas, in Dara-e Pech district or in Asadabad.²²¹⁶

Other districts of origin of IDPs included Chawkay (10 545, most of them in February 2020), Nurgal (8 603, for the most part displaced in September 2019 and March 2020) and Watapur (6 101, with significant numbers recorded in June 2019).²²¹⁷ These displacement waves are linked to inter-AGEs clashes in Nurgal's case²²¹⁸, and to ANDSF operations against ISKP in Chawkay and Nurgal.²²¹⁹ Cross-border shelling was another cause of displacement, such as in Nari district in October 2019.²²²⁰ In October 2019, clashes between Afghan and Pakistani forces resulted in 3 500 – 4 200 people being displaced in the Kunar border areas.²²²¹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 45 798 persons displaced to Kunar province, all of them being intra-provincial movements. The IDPs mainly headed to Chapadara (18 340), provincial capital Asadabad (7 700) and Chawkay (7 647).²²²²

²²⁰⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 23

²²⁰⁸ VoA, Official: Taliban, IS Deprive Afghan Kids of Polio Vaccine, 18 April 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 – 25 August 2019), 25 August 2019, [url](#)

²²¹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (29 July – 04 August 2019), 7 August 2019, [url](#)

²²¹¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Special Report: Attacks on Healthcare during the COVID-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²²¹² UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/897–S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²²¹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²²¹⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²²¹⁵ BBC News, *دو هزار خانواده درگیری داعش و طالبان در شرق افغانستان* [Clashes between ISIS and the Taliban in eastern Afghanistan have displaced 2,000 families], 27 March 2019, [url](#)

²²¹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Kunar Conflict – Update (as of 3 April 2019), 4 April 2019, [url](#)

²²¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²²¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 September – 22 September 2019), 22 September 2019, [url](#)

²²¹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (2 March - 8 March 2020), 11 March 2020, [url](#)

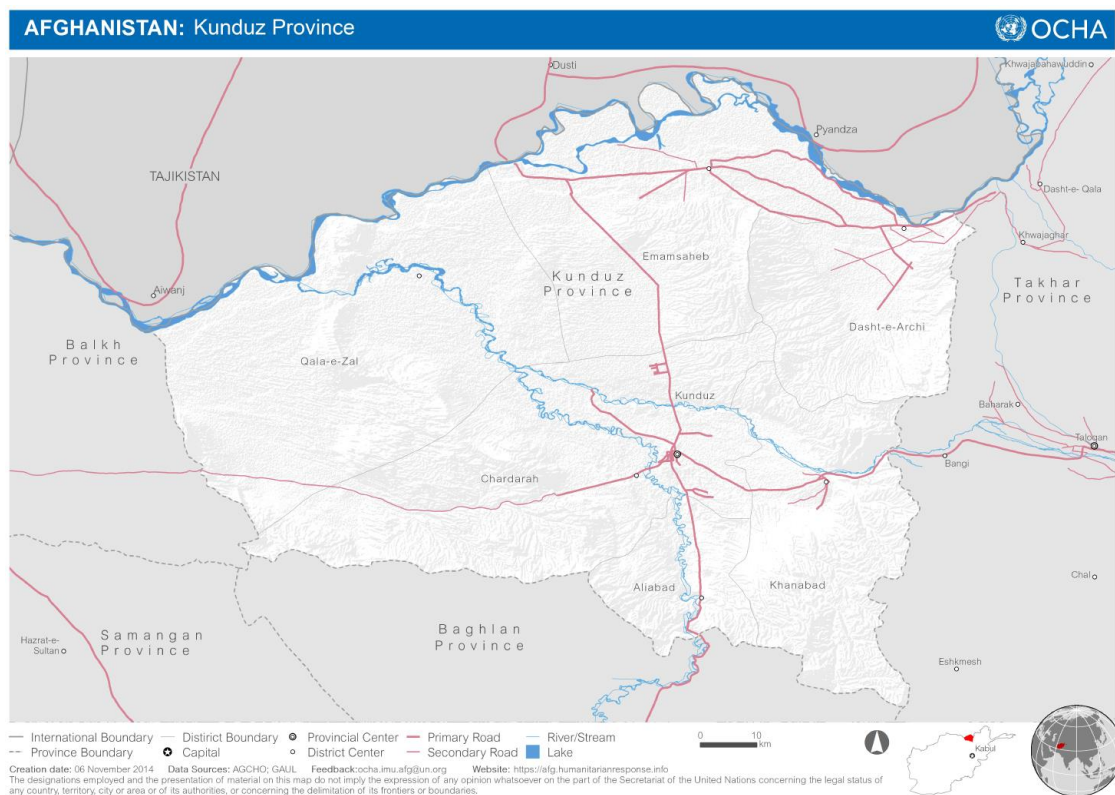
²²²⁰ AP, Afghan, Pakistani forces clash on border, 3 civilians killed, 28 October 2019, [url](#)

²²²¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October – 3 November 2019), 6 November 2019, [url](#)

²²²² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

2.20 Kunduz

2.20.1 General description of the province



Map 20: Afghanistan – Kunduz province, source: UNOCHA²²²³

Kunduz province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Takhar province to the east, Baghlan province to the south, Balkh province to the west and an international border with Tajikistan to the north.²²²⁴ Kunduz province is divided into the following administrative units: Aliabad, Chardarah, Dasht-e-Archi, Emamsaheb, Khanabad, Kunduz and Qala-e-Zai.²²²⁵ Gulbad, Gultepa and Aqtash are more recently established districts.²²²⁶ The provincial capital is Kunduz City.²²²⁷

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1 136 677, 365 529 of whom live in the provincial capital, Kunduz.²²²⁸ The main ethnic group in the province are Pashtuns. Other ethnic groups present include Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazara, Turkmen and Pashai²²²⁹ as well as Qazak, Aymaq, Arab, Gujar, Baluch and Nuritani.²²³⁰

A section of Asian Highway AH7 from Kabul passes through the provinces of Parwan and Baghlan and connects the national capital with Kunduz province and the border crossing to Tajikistan at the port of Sher Khan (also Sher Khan Bandar).²²³¹ The Kunduz-Takhar Highway passes through the district of

²²²³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²²²⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²²²⁵ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 29

²²²⁶ Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#); Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Kunduz, 2020, [url](#)

²²²⁷ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunduz, 1 February 2017, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 29

²²²⁸ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 29

²²²⁹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunduz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²²³⁰ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunduz, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²²³¹ Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#), p.5; RFE/RL, Tajikistan/Afghanistan: Road Bridge Opens With Aim Of Strengthening Trade, 26 August 2007, [url](#)

Khanabad and connects the province with Takhar and Badakhshan.²²³² In an assessment report published by the German NGO The Johanniter International Assistance (JUH) in November 2019, no movement was possible from dusk until dawn on Khanabad road connecting Kunduz and Takhar provincial capital Taloqan.²²³³ After having been controlled by the Taliban for about a month, Kunduz-Khanabad road was reopened by Afghan security forces at the end of December 2019.²²³⁴

The province has always been a strategic crossing-point. Being close to Tajikistan, it hosted the Tajikistan Islamic opposition during the Tajik civil war in the 1990s and it provided access to the main smuggling routes to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Moreover, located near a main road to Kabul, it connects the rest of Afghanistan with its northern region.²²³⁵

The inauguration of a new terminal with a capacity of 1 300 passengers at Kunduz airport was announced in February 2017.²²³⁶ While officials announced in March 2018 that civil flights would resume soon at Kunduz airport²²³⁷, there was no information available on scheduled flights as of July 2020.²²³⁸

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Kunduz maintained its poppy-free status, which it has held since 2007, as poppy cultivation in Kunduz remained under the threshold of 100 hectares, the UNODC threshold for obtaining 'poppy-free status'.²²³⁹

2.20.2 Conflict background and actors in Kunduz

The security situation of Kunduz province has purportedly been deteriorating over recent years²²⁴⁰, including in 2019.²²⁴¹ Kunduz was the last Taliban stronghold before the Taliban's fall in 2001, when it was freed by US led security forces.²²⁴² Kunduz City temporarily fell to the Taliban in September 2015²²⁴³, and they almost recaptured it in October 2016 by encircling the city and cutting off the main supply and reinforcement routes.²²⁴⁴ After these attempts by the Taliban to capture Kunduz City, the Afghan security forces tried to regain control over the districts of Dasht-e-Archi, Qala-e-Zal, Emamsaheb and parts of Khanabad, which served as strategic strongholds for the Taliban offensive. The operations took long and control over the districts changed hands a few times, purportedly contributing to instability in the province.²²⁴⁵ In 2017, renewed attempts by the Taliban to get closer to the provincial capital through attacking nearby Dasht-e-Archi took place, but these were repelled by Afghan security forces.²²⁴⁶ According to a report by AAN in 2017, AGEs had been weakened by night raids and air strikes carried out by coalition forces, which killed key figures of the Taliban movement, like the Taliban shadow governor of the province, Mullah Salam. The appointment of his successor created tensions among the Taliban in Chardarah and Dasht-e-Archi, which weakened the coordination of the movement in the province.²²⁴⁷ However according to an Afghanistan analyst contacted by the Swedish Migration

²²³² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, [url](#)

²²³³ JUH/JACK, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Kunduz Province, November 2019, [url](#), p. 20

²²³⁴ Ariana News, Kunduz-Khan Abad Highway Cleared of Taliban, 26 December 2019, [url](#)

²²³⁵ DW, Kunduz violence could destabilize neighbors, 30 September 2015, [url](#)

²²³⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz airport gets new terminal worth \$1.4m, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

²²³⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Corruption alleged in Kunduz City airport project, 7 March 2018, [url](#)

²²³⁸ Flightradar24, UND/OAUZ Kunduz Afghanistan – Routes, n.d., [url](#); KamAir, Route Map, n.d., [url](#)

²²³⁹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), pp. 21, 27

²²⁴⁰ Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, [url](#)

²²⁴¹ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 47

²²⁴² RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

²²⁴³ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

²²⁴⁴ Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, [url](#)

²²⁴⁵ Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, [url](#)

²²⁴⁶ Ali, O., New Taleban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordination, still well placed to threaten the city, AAN, 9 July 2017, [url](#); Tolonews, Dozens of Afghan Forces Killed In North, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

²²⁴⁷ Ali, O., New Taleban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordination, still well placed to threaten the city, AAN, 9 July 2017, [url](#)

Agency (Migrationsverket) in January 2020, Kunduz is, together with Baghlan, considered to be the most Taliban-controlled or influenced province in the north-eastern region.²²⁴⁸

In late 2018 the government's presence reached almost half of the districts Aliabad, Emamsaheb and Khanabad, whilst the remaining parts were contested. Aqtash, Gulbad and Gultepa were largely or entirely under Taliban control.²²⁴⁹ Based on research, AAN considered the Taliban to be almost entirely in control of Dasht-e-Archi district in May 2019, having established parallel shadow governance structures in absence of most Afghan government officials.²²⁵⁰ In September 2019, no presidential elections took place in Dasht-e-Archi, Qala-e-Zal, Aqtash, Gulbad, and Gultepa districts, due to the Taliban controlling those districts.²²⁵¹ In a conversation with Landinfo in October 2019, Afghanistan analyst Obaid Ali said that districts in Kunduz province changing hands between government forces and the Taliban was common.²²⁵² According to Obaid Ali the Taliban controlled more or less most districts in Kunduz province.²²⁵³ According to an assessment published by the German NGO The Johanniter International Assistance in November 2019, 80 % of Kunduz province, in particular the rural areas, was under Taliban control, while most district administrative centres were under control of the security forces.²²⁵⁴ At the end of 2019 Emamsaheb district was described as 'largely controlled by the Taliban'.²²⁵⁵ As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Dasht-e-Archi, Khanabad and Qala-e-Zal districts as 'Taliban-controlled' and the remaining districts in Kunduz province as 'contested'.²²⁵⁶

According to an April 2018 report by the Jamestown Foundation, a US-based institute for research and analysis, the Islamic State (ISKP) set up bases in the northern provinces of Afghanistan, including in Kunduz.²²⁵⁷ A June 2019 New York Times article noted that ISKP cells had recently appeared in Kunduz province.²²⁵⁸ The Afghan Ministry of Interior claimed to have arrested an ISKP leader in Emamsaheb district in July 2019, accusing him of recruiting in Kunduz.²²⁵⁹ The presence of active ISKP cells in Kunduz was also mentioned on Twitter in August and October 2019 by an anonymous account, drawing information from a seemingly large network of local (Twitter) sources.²²⁶⁰ An attack on a checkpoint on the border between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in November 2019 was attributed to ISKP by Tajik officials²²⁶¹, although not claimed by the movement itself. The attackers were said to have entered Tajikistan from Kunduz province, through Qala-e-Zal district, which is said to be almost under complete Taliban control. According to the Qala-e-Zal district governor an ISKP commander had been recruiting fighters in the district.²²⁶²

In the past, Kunduz province has been hosting foreign fighters from Central Asia, such as members of the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which were purportedly active along the 'porous' Afghan-Tajik border.²²⁶³ Besides Uzbek and Tajik militants, fighters coming from

²²⁴⁸ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 48

²²⁴⁹ Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](#)

²²⁵⁰ Bjelica J., One Land, Two Rules (5): The polio vaccination gap, AAN, 9 May 2019, [url](#)

²²⁵¹ Ali, O., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

²²⁵² Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2019, [url](#), p. 28

²²⁵³ Ali, O., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

²²⁵⁴ JUH/JACK, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Kunduz Province, November 2019, [url](#), pp. 14-15; 20

²²⁵⁵ NYT, Roadside Bomb Kills 13 People on Their Way to Afghan Wedding, 28 November 2019, [url](#)

²²⁵⁶ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated. Also the map does not indicate the assessment for the newly created Gulbad, Gultepa and Aqtash districts.

²²⁵⁷ Jamestown Foundation (The), Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, 6 April 2018, [url](#)

²²⁵⁸ NYT, U.S. Special Forces Battle Against ISIS Turns to Containment, and Concern, 14 June 2019, [url](#)

²²⁵⁹ Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces arrest top ISIS leader in Kunduz province, 7 July 2019, [url](#)

²²⁶⁰ Dr. Drexluddin Khan Spiveyzai (@RisboLensky), [Twitter], posted on: 19 October 2019, [url](#); Dr. Drexluddin Khan Spiveyzai (@RisboLensky), [Twitter], posted on: 6 August 2019, [url](#)

²²⁶¹ Asia Plus, Tajik security forces launch operation to hunt alleged terrorists who turn out to be ... ordinary hunters, 11 November 2019, [url](#)

²²⁶² NYT, ISIS Fighters Attack Outpost in Tajikistan, 6 November 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Reported Attack In Tajikistan Could Have Broad Implications For Central Asia, 6 November 2019, [url](#)

²²⁶³ DW, Kunduz violence could destabilize neighbors, 30 September 2015, [url](#)

Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Chechnya were also reported to have been active in the province.²²⁶⁴ Moreover, an insurgent group called Jabha-ye Qariha ('the front of those who have memorised the Quran by heart', the *qaris*), which is known as the military wing of Jundullah, is purportedly active in Dasht-e-Archi district. Although Jundullah is an independent group, it is allied with the Taliban even if the two insurgent groups have different beliefs.²²⁶⁵

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Kunduz province is under the responsibility of the 217th ANA corps after ANA's 20th Division, previously under the ANA 209th Corps, was reassigned in April 2019 to become a new corps, the 217th Corps.²²⁶⁶ The 217th Corps has its headquarters in Kunduz.²²⁶⁷ As of 30 April 2020, Kunduz province was still included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.²²⁶⁸

2.20.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.20.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 492 civilian casualties (141 deaths and 351 injured) in Kunduz. This represents an increase of 46 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements followed by non-suicide IEDs and air strikes.²²⁶⁹ In the first half of 2020, UNAMA ranked Kunduz province fifth in terms of civilians most affected by the conflict, documenting 205 civilian casualties in the province.²²⁷⁰ Resolute Support recorded between 127 and 175 civilian casualties in Kunduz in the first half of 2020, reporting a 22 % decrease in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.²²⁷¹

ACLED collected data on 629 violent events in Kunduz province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020; 446 of which were coded as battles, 153 as explosions/remote violence and 30 as violence against civilians.²²⁷² With 170 incidents Kunduz stood out as the district where ACLED registered most violent events, followed by Khanabad and Emamsaheb, with 100 or more incidents each and then followed by Chardarah and Dasht-e-Archi with over 60 incidents each.²²⁷³

²²⁶⁴ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

²²⁶⁵ Ali, O., One Land, Two Rules (3): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Dasht-e Archi district in Kunduz province, AAN, 26 February 2019, [url](#)

²²⁶⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 78

²²⁶⁷ USDOD, Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Lead Inspector General Report To The United States Congress. April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019, 16 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

²²⁶⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12; 50; USDOD, Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Lead Inspector General Report To The United States Congress. April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019, 16 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 27-28; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

²²⁶⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

²²⁷⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²²⁷¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

²²⁷² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²²⁷³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

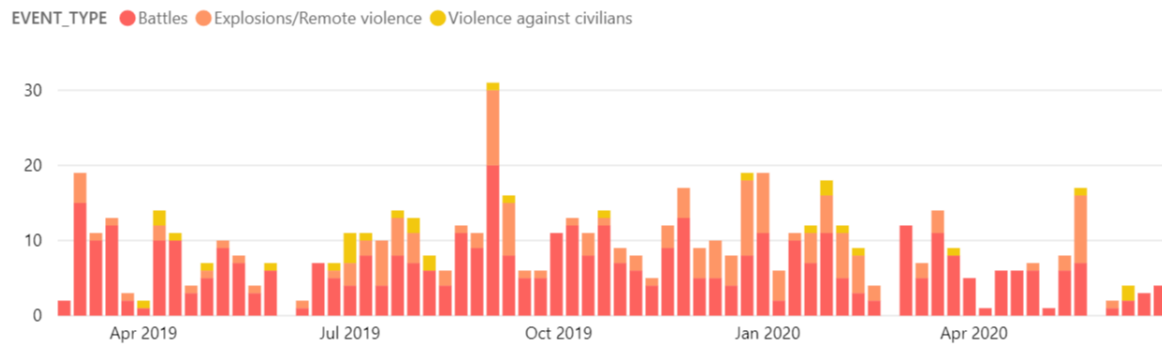


Figure 22. Kunduz - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data²²⁷⁴

ACLED coded 71 % of the violent incidents in Kunduz province as battles, nearly all armed clashes, representing the most prevalent incident type in all of Kunduz' districts.²²⁷⁵ The majority of those armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police, military or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or so-called Arbakis (the term 'Arbaki' is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias)²²⁷⁶, or government officials.²²⁷⁷ These also included attacks on military or police facilities such as checkpoints²²⁷⁸, bases²²⁷⁹ and headquarters²²⁸⁰ and on convoys²²⁸¹ and vehicles.²²⁸² These attacks inflicted losses among security forces causing concern in December 2019 about a rise in casualties.²²⁸³ At times these incidents also resulted in civilian casualties, as for example in Kunduz City, when a police officer was killed and his two friends, civilians, who were taking a walk with him were wounded on 19 July 2019.²²⁸⁴ Civilian casualties were also reported during clashes in Chardarah district in March 2019²²⁸⁵ or in Dasht-e- Archi district in September 2019.²²⁸⁶ Civilians were killed in crossfire

²²⁷⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kunduz, [url](#)

²²⁷⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²²⁷⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 17-23, 23 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 15-21, 22 March 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

²²⁷⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

²²⁷⁸ NYT, Taliban Ramp Up Attacks on Afghans After Trump Says 'No Violence', 4 March 2019, [url](#); Gandhara (RFE/RL), Taliban Attacks On Afghan Security Forces Leave Dozens Dead, 1 January 2020, [url](#); Xinhua, Xinhua Asia-Pacific news summary at 1000 GMT, Oct. 22, 22 October 2019, [url](#); Xinhua, Over 40 including 3 civilians killed within one day in Afghan fighting, 4 March 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Taliban Attack In Northern Afghanistan Kills At Least 13, 29 January 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 policemen killed, 20 captured in Kunduz assault, 30 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz: 5 Afghan soldiers killed in Taliban attack, 18 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

²²⁷⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 Afghan soldiers killed in Kunduz assault, 20 November 2019, [url](#)

NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-july 4, 4 July 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 16 ANA soldiers killed in Taliban attack in Kunduz, 4 March 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

²²⁸⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

²²⁸¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

²²⁸² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

²²⁸³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces' mounting casualties spark concerns, 12 December 2019, [url](#)

²²⁸⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, [url](#)

²²⁸⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 15-21, 22 March 2019, [url](#)

²²⁸⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

following Taliban attacks on checkpoints in Dasht-e Archi on 9 February 2020 or in Aqtash and Khanabad districts in March 2020.²²⁸⁷

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes. With the approval of the Ministry of Defence's Operation Khalid on 2 April 2019, Kunduz was one of the provinces in the north-east that security forces' operations focused on.²²⁸⁸ Afghan forces also stepped up operations against the Taliban in Kunduz towards the end of 2019.²²⁸⁹ Several of the security operations in Kunduz province were backed by air strikes.²²⁹⁰ While operations led to arrests²²⁹¹ and inflicted losses among AGEs²²⁹², some also caused civilian casualties, for example on 23 March 2019 when at least 13 civilians, mostly children from the same family, were killed in joint US - Afghan air strikes near Kunduz City²²⁹³, in Gultepa district.²²⁹⁴

The Taliban temporarily overtook district administrative centres in Dasht-e-Archi²²⁹⁵, Qala-e-Zal²²⁹⁶ and Khanabad districts in the last quarter of 2019.²²⁹⁷ In March 2019, areas in Emamsaheb district were temporarily captured by the Taliban.²²⁹⁸

More than half of the 153 reported incidents of explosions/remote violence registered by ACLED in Kunduz province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, were air/drone strikes.²²⁹⁹ Air strikes represent 13 % of all violent incidents in Kunduz province and were mainly carried out in Khanabad and Emamsaheb districts, followed by Dasht-e-Archi, Chardarah and Kunduz districts.²³⁰⁰ While those air strikes destroyed Taliban facilities, such as hideouts, weapon caches and prisons, and inflicted

²²⁸⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

²²⁸⁸ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/902-S/2019/493, 14 June 2019, [url](#), p. 5

²²⁸⁹ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Launch Large-Scale Operation In Kunduz: MoD, 21 November 2019, [url](#); Xinhua, Afghan army kicks off operation to trace militants in restive province, 21 November 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Taliban kill U.S. force member in northern Afghanistan, 22 December 2019, [url](#); EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²²⁹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²²⁹¹ Khaama Press, 2 senior Taliban commanders arrested, 2 others killed in the outskirts of Kunduz city, 26 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 3 Taliban militants killed, 2 detained in Balkh and Kunduz provinces, 20 June 2019, [url](#)

²²⁹² Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 Taliban killed in Kunduz operation, 9 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, More than 30 Taliban, ISIS-K militants killed, wounded in latest security operations, 16 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 58 rebels, 4 security forces killed in Kunduz operation, 23 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 10 Taliban militants killed, 9 arrested in Kunduz and Badghis operations, 15 April 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces inflict heavy casualties on Taliban militants in Badghis, Kunduz, 2 August 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Airstrike in Kunduz kills top Taliban commander and his comrades, 3 September 2019, [url](#)

²²⁹³ France24, Air strike kills 10 children in Afghanistan, UN says, 25 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Women, children among 12 killed in Kunduz blitz, 23 March 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Kunduz Airstrike Kills 13 Civilians, Mostly Children – Un Initial Findings, 25 March 2019, [url](#)

²²⁹⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 22-28, 29 March 2019, [url](#)

²²⁹⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban overrun district; police in denial, 8 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces regain Dasht-i-Archi control, 12 October 2019, [url](#)

²²⁹⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

²²⁹⁷ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/582-S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6; Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

²²⁹⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill 10 security forces, capture 7 in Kunduz, 4 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban suffer heavy in Afghan Special Forces operation in Kunduz province, 6 March 2019 [url](#)

²²⁹⁹ These do not include air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under 'battles'. For more information on ACLED's methodology, please consult the introduction.

²³⁰⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

losses among AGEs²³⁰¹, some also caused civilian casualties, for example in Dasht-e-Archi district in late January 2020, when a US drone hit a family on their way from a funeral²³⁰² or in Emamsaheb district on 21 March 2020.²³⁰³ Four civilians were killed and six others were injured in Dasht-e Archi in March 2020 when their house, located near a military base, was hit by a bomb in response to a Taliban attack on the base.²³⁰⁴ Three civilians were killed when a rocket fired by Afghan forces hit a house in Khanabad district (Aqtash district, according to the New York Times)²³⁰⁵ in May 2020.²³⁰⁶ In the first half of 2020, UNAMA documented more than half of all civilian casualties as a result of Afghan Air Force air strikes in Kunduz and Balkh provinces.²³⁰⁷

Incidents where the Taliban or unidentified armed groups used roadside bombs and IEDs to target Afghan and international security forces or government officials²³⁰⁸, represented 7 % of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Kunduz province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.²³⁰⁹ Some of these incidents caused civilian casualties as for example in Khanabad district on 27 November 2019, when at least 13 civilians, mostly members of a family on their way to a wedding were killed when their car hit a roadside bomb.²³¹⁰ Also in Khanabad district, at least six labourers were killed after their car was hit by a roadside bomb on 1 June 2020.²³¹¹ Five children were killed and three others wounded when a bomb inside or near a madrasa exploded on 14 February 2020 in Dasht-e-Archi district.²³¹²

Incidents of shelling in Kunduz province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 were attributed to both the Taliban and Afghan security forces.²³¹³ Some resulted in civilian casualties, for example when a mortar shell fired at Taliban positions hit a house in Qala-e-Zal district on 18 August 2019²³¹⁴, when a mortar fired by the Taliban hit a house on 17 February 2020, killing a child and injuring eight other members of the same family²³¹⁵, or when artillery rounds shot by the Afghan military targeting Taliban positions killed eight civilians and injured two in Khanabad district on 16 March 2020.²³¹⁶

²³⁰¹ Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces destroy Taliban prison, arms and explosives depots in Kunduz, 9 April 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban killed, 6 wounded in Kunduz airstrikes, 9 January 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January – 2 February 2020), 5 February 2020, [url](#)

²³⁰² NYT, Taliban's Continued Attacks Show Limits of U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan, 31 January 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilian deaths in Kunduz strike trigger protest, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

²³⁰³ UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, [url](#), p. 6; NYT, Pompeo Cuts \$1 Billion in Afghan Aid as 2 Leaders Reject Push for Unity, 23 March 2020, [url](#)

²³⁰⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

²³⁰⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

²³⁰⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 16

²³⁰⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 16

²³⁰⁸ NYT, American Special Forces Soldier Is Killed in Afghanistan, 22 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

²³⁰⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²³¹⁰ NYT, Roadside Bomb Kills 13 People on Their Way to Afghan Wedding, 28 November 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, 13 Dead in Kunduz Blast All Belonged to Two Families, 28 November 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz: 15 civilians killed in roadside blast, 28 November 2019, [url](#)

²³¹¹ Afghanistan Times, Roadside bomb kills 7 workers in Kunduz, 2 June 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 labourers killed, 6 wounded in Kunduz blast, 2 June 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (1 – 7 June 2020), 10 June 2020, [url](#)

²³¹² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok afghan News, 5 children injured in Kunduz roadside blast, 14 February 2020, [url](#)

²³¹³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²³¹⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

²³¹⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

²³¹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, [url](#), p. 6

Thirty incidents categorised by ACLED as violence against civilians represented 5 % of all violent events registered by ACLED in Kunduz province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.²³¹⁷ These included attacks by Afghan or international military forces or by pro-government forces, during which civilians were killed²³¹⁸; the killing of civilians in a wedding convoy for refusing to pay money to soldiers²³¹⁹; the ISKP-claimed killing of a Shiite cleric²³²⁰; another killing of a Shiite religious scholar attributed to the Taliban²³²¹; the Taliban firing at wedding party guests in Kunduz City²³²²; the killing of a bodybuilder²³²³; the killing of government employees and officials²³²⁴; the killing of off-duty ANDSF personnel²³²⁵; the killing of the brother of a special forces commander²³²⁶; the killing of a tribal elder accused of having relations with the intelligence service²³²⁷; and the killing of a human rights activist by the Taliban or unidentified anti-government armed groups.²³²⁸

While armed clashes were the prevalent type of violent event, as they were in all of Kunduz province's districts, Kunduz district showed a somewhat different conflict pattern with 13 % of all violent incidents in the district involving the use of IEDs and 8 % involving shelling or artillery. Over half of the incidents involving the use of IEDs and/or shelling in all of Kunduz province occurred in Kunduz district alone.²³²⁹ As elsewhere in the province, some of these incidents also caused civilian casualties in Kunduz City, as did the detonation of bombs attached to a bicycle on 17 July 2019²³³⁰ and on 19 May 2020.²³³¹

In March 2020 Pajhwok reported on a rise in crime, in particular kidnappings, in Kunduz City. According to the deputy head of the Kunduz Provincial Council, this raised concerns among residents, prompting them to keep their children home from school.²³³²

Following reports of the Taliban gathering on the outskirts of the city in March 2019²³³³, Kunduz was the focus of Taliban attacks just after the announcement of the spring fighting season.²³³⁴ Again following reports of high levels of Taliban activity near the provincial capital²³³⁵, on 31 August 2019, Kunduz was the first of three provincial centres, the others being Pul-e Khumri and Farah, to come

²³¹⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²³¹⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

²³¹⁹ NYT, Where Violence Can Strike Anywhere, Even at a Wedding Party on the Move, 1 April 2019, [url](#)

²³²⁰ Dr. Drexluddin Khan Spiveyzai (@RisboLensky), [Twitter], posted on: 4 August 2019, [url](#); Melisa (@cmellaniac), [Twitter], posted on: 4 August 2019, [url](#)

²³²¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

²³²² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](#)

²³²³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

²³²⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 12-18, 18 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

²³²⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

²³²⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

²³²⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 12-18, 18 April 2019, [url](#)

²³²⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²³²⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²³³⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, [url](#)

²³³¹ 1TV, Bicycle bomb kills two, injures 18 in Kunduz city, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²³³² Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz residents in fear as kidnapping incidents spike, 9 March 2020, [url](#)

²³³³ NYT, After Deadly Insider Attack, U.S. Airstrikes Kill 14 Civilians, Afghans Say, 23 March 2019, [url](#)

²³³⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 12-18, 18 April 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Clashes Ongoing Near Kunduz City: Officials, 13 April 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's attempt at capturing Kunduz City thwarted, 15 April 2019, [url](#)

²³³⁵ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/990-S/2019/703, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 6

under Taliban attack from different directions.²³³⁶ This was the third time Kunduz came under Taliban attack since 2015²³³⁷ and it happened at a time when talks between the Taliban and the United States were finalizing.²³³⁸ The Taliban attacked Kunduz from PD1, PD2 and PD3 to the north and north-west, areas that are part of the city but rural in character, where they have maintained a strong presence and where they enjoy the support of the mainly Pashtun population.²³³⁹ They were able to enter deep into the city and briefly occupy the health department and a hospital.²³⁴⁰ According to initial reports, civilians stayed in their homes on 31 August 2019.²³⁴¹ Exit routes were contested, phone lines were disrupted and electricity interrupted²³⁴², affecting water supply.²³⁴³ Markets, bazaars and shops were closed.²³⁴⁴ In the evening a suicide bombing was carried out on Kunduz's main square, wounding the provincial police chief.²³⁴⁵ By the next day the fighting had ended and phone and power lines were partly restored, according to UNOCHA.²³⁴⁶ Initial reports mentioned at least 61 civilian casualties.²³⁴⁷ In the following days sporadic clashes occurred in some parts of the city, but the situation was described as having returned to normal and under control.²³⁴⁸ However the main routes to and from the city remained closed in the beginning of September 2019.²³⁴⁹ This also affected food prices.²³⁵⁰

According to verifications by UNAMA, the fighting in Kunduz between 31 August and 11 September 2019 caused 99 civilian casualties, more than the number of civilian casualties in the other two provincial capitals that had also come under attack.²³⁵¹ Civilian homes were damaged by the fighting.²³⁵² Following the 31 August attack on Kunduz, a suicide attack was carried out in the city on 2 September 2019, killing more than ten people and wounding dozens, including civilians.²³⁵³ The suicide attack took place in the outskirts of the city, near the highway connecting Kunduz with other provinces.²³⁵⁴ On 19 May 2020 the Taliban again attacked different parts and several checkpoints of

²³³⁶ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan City Survives Third Taliban Assault, but Loses a Top Defender, 31 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

²³³⁷ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Responding Taliban Attack In Kunduz, 31 August 2019, [url](#)

²³³⁸ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

²³³⁹ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

²³⁴⁰ NYT, Taliban Attack Second Afghan City in 2 Days as Peace Deal Nears, 1 September 2019, [url](#)

²³⁴¹ UNOCHA, Flash Update 1 – Armed clashes in Kunduz city (31 Aug 2019), 31 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan City Survives Third Taliban Assault, but Loses a Top Defender, 31 August 2019, [url](#)

²³⁴² UNOCHA, Flash Update 1 – Armed clashes in Kunduz city (31 Aug 2019), 31 August 2019, [url](#)

²³⁴³ Ali, O., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) Meeting 04 Sep 2019 at 09:00 AM in ACTED Kunduz Office 4 September 2019, [url](#), p. 1

²³⁴⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz City comes under multi-pronged rebel attack, 31 August 2019, [url](#); BBC, Afghanistan conflict: Taliban storm key northern city, 31 August 2019, [url](#)

²³⁴⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz police chief wounded in blast amid clashes, 31 August 2019, [url](#)

²³⁴⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Flash Update 2 – Lull in armed clashes in Kunduz city and new clashes in Pul-e-Khumri (1 September 2019), 1 September 2019, [url](#)

²³⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Flash Update 2 – Lull in armed clashes in Kunduz city and new clashes in Pul-e-Khumri (1 September 2019), 1 September 2019, [url](#)

²³⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pul-e-Khumri Flash Update No.3 (03 September 2019), 3 September 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pul-e-Khumri Flash Update No.4 (09 September 2019), 9 September 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, 20 Security Force Members Killed In Kunduz Battle, 1 September 2019, [url](#)

²³⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pul-e-Khumri Flash Update No.4 (09 September 2019), 9 September 2019, [url](#)

²³⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) Meeting 04 Sep 2019 at 09:00 AM in ACTED Kunduz Office 4 September 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Salaam Times, Kunduz residents describe miserable living conditions after Taliban offensive, 9 September 2019, [url](#)

²³⁵¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 35

²³⁵² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pul-e-Khumri Flash Update No.4, 9 September 2019, [url](#)

²³⁵³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Update: Suicide attack in Kunduz leaves at least 17 dead, wounded, 2 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 policemen killed, 7 injured in Kunduz suicide blast, 2 September 2019, [url](#)

²³⁵⁴ Tolonews, Suicide Bombing Targets Afghan Forces In Kunduz, 2 September 2019, [url](#)

Kunduz City.²³⁵⁵ One civilian was killed in this attack. The attacks were repelled and the situation reportedly returned to normal after a few hours of clashes.²³⁵⁶ Some fighting reportedly continued in one on the city's suburbs.²³⁵⁷

There were reports from the north-eastern region, including from Kunduz province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019.²³⁵⁸ UNAMA documented at least 25 telecommunications towers across Kunduz province being damaged by the Taliban.²³⁵⁹ According to AAN telecommunication networks' service in Kunduz remained cut until 1 October.²³⁶⁰ Kunduz province saw the lowest turnout for the presidential election of 28 September 2019 in Afghanistan. This was attributed to bad security.²³⁶¹ In an attempt to disrupt the elections, the Taliban fired rockets on Kunduz City, causing civilian casualties.²³⁶² Together with Kabul City, Kunduz was where most incidents were recorded on election day.²³⁶³ Markets, shops were closed and supply of goods into and from Kunduz province was cut due to threats and insecurity before and during the elections.²³⁶⁴

Security incidents, including attacks on checkpoints and closures as a result of clashes were reported on both the Kunduz-Baghlan and Kunduz-Takhar Highways during the reporting period.²³⁶⁵ The Taliban at times were able to block access and prevent movement on those highways.²³⁶⁶ Sources told AAN that in the aftermath of the 31 August 2019 attack on Kunduz the Taliban continued to set up mobile checkpoints on both Kunduz-Baghlan and the Kunduz-Takhar Highways.²³⁶⁷ Taliban checkpoints on both highways were still operational in 2020.²³⁶⁸ UNOCHA noted that fighting between AGEs and security forces impacted humanitarian partners' access to people in need in Dasht-e Archi and other districts in Kunduz province in February 2020.²³⁶⁹

²³⁵⁵ NYT, Clinic Bombed as Afghan Forces Fend Off Taliban Attack on Kunduz, 19 May 2020, [url](#); Guardian (The), Despite the 'peace process', Afghanistan's anguish endures, 20 May 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 24 Taliban killed, 60 wounded in Kunduz battle, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²³⁵⁶ Tolonews, Taliban Attack Kunduz City, Clash With Security Forces, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²³⁵⁷ NYT, Clinic Bombed as Afghan Forces Fend Off Taliban Attack on Kunduz, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²³⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, [url](#); Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 10; NYT, To Disrupt Elections, Taliban Turn to an Old Tactic: Destroying Cell Towers, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

²³⁵⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 35

²³⁶⁰ Ali, O., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

²³⁶¹ Ali, O., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

²³⁶² Pajhwok Afghan News, Would-be suicide bomber killed in Kunduz, 28 September 2019, [url](#); Ali, O., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

²³⁶³ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/582-S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, [url](#), p. 5; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

²³⁶⁴ Ali, O., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

²³⁶⁵ NYT, U.S. Drone Killed Afghan Civilians, Officials Say, 1 December 2019, [url](#); Xinhua, 11 police, 10 militants killed in northern Afghanistan: official, 16 January 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's attempt at capturing Kunduz City thwarted, 15 April 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, District chief demand more troops as Taliban attacks Khanabad district, 6 September 2019, [url](#); Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 September – 6 October 2019), 9 October 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Five Security Force Members Killed on Kunduz-Baghlan Highway, 2 February 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 October – 27 October 2019), 30 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January – 2 February 2020), 5 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

²³⁶⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (2 December – 8 December 2019), 11 December 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 December – 22 December 2019), 26 December 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 January – 26 January 2020), 29 January 2020, [url](#)

²³⁶⁷ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

²³⁶⁸ Ariana News, Taliban set up checkpoint – Baghlan-Kunduz Highway, 16 February 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 April – 20 April 2020), 22 April 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz: Taliban take tax on imported goods, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

²³⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (17 February – 23 February 2020), 26 February 2020, [url](#)

In its report covering 2019 UNAMA noted that in certain parts of Afghanistan, including Kunduz and Dasht-e-Archi, several private telecommunications companies, with the exception of Salaam Telecommunications, shut down their services in the evening following up on threats and orders issued by the Taliban in order to prevent being tracked down or targeted during operations.²³⁷⁰

Local officials accused to Taliban of setting fire to a girls' school in Qala-e-Zal district in October 2019.²³⁷¹ Within the framework of its attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) did not register such attacks in Kunduz province in 2019.²³⁷² On 2 February 2020, an air strike by the Afghan Air Force inflicted damage to a health clinic and a school building in Gultepa district.²³⁷³ In an effort to push back Taliban attacks on Kunduz City on 19 May 2020, but also on other districts²³⁷⁴, joint US–Afghan forces bombed a hospital in Chardarah district.²³⁷⁵ At least two civilians standing outside the hospital were killed. Health services there only resumed on 2 June 2020.²³⁷⁶

2.20.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 31 274 persons displaced by conflict from Kunduz province, 97 % of whom were displaced within the province itself, while others sought refuge in Kabul, Takhar and to a lesser extent in Balkh, Herat and Faryab provinces. Over 60 % were displaced from Kunduz district, in particular in August, September, November and December 2019.²³⁷⁷ While initially no significant displacement was observed when the Taliban launched their attack on Kunduz City on 31 August 2019, thousands were displaced within the city in early September 2019, with many returning home in the following days.²³⁷⁸ UNOCHA recorded a few thousand people displaced due to conflict within Kunduz district in September 2019.²³⁷⁹ Large groups were also displaced from Dasht-e-Archi district in September and October 2019 and from Emamsaheb district in July and September 2019. All IDPs from Emamsaheb were displaced within the district. The majority of the IDPs from Dasht-e-Archi were also displaced within the district, while a few hundred sought refuge in Kunduz.²³⁸⁰

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 33 866 persons displaced by conflict to Kunduz province. In addition to the 30 289 people displaced within the province, Kunduz also hosted IDPs from Takhar province and in 2020 some from Faryab province. Kunduz district hosted the majority of the people displaced to Kunduz province in the reporting period, most from within the district, but also from other districts in Kunduz province as well as from Takhar province. Both Dasht-e-Archi and Emamsaheb district hosted only IDPs from within the district.²³⁸¹

²³⁷⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 109-110 ; USIP, Service Delivery in Taliban-Influenced Areas of Afghanistan, 30 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 16-17; JUH/JACK, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Kunduz Province, November 2019, [url](#), p. 14; 21

²³⁷¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Girls' school set ablaze in Kunduz's Qala Zal district, 6 October 2019, [url](#)

²³⁷² WHO, Afghanistan. Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019 [url](#)

²³⁷³ UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, [url](#), p. 9; Pajhwok Afghan News, Parts of school, clinic damaged in Kunduz airstrike: Officials, 3 February 2020, [url](#)

²³⁷⁴ Tolonews, Taliban Attack Kunduz City, Clash With Security Forces, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²³⁷⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#); NYT, Clinic Bombed as Afghan Forces Fend Off Taliban Attack on Kunduz, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

²³⁷⁶ UNAMA, Special Report: Attacks On Healthcare During The Covid-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 11

²³⁷⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²³⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pul-e-Khumri Flash Update No.4 (09 September 2019), 9 September 2019, [url](#); iDMC, Afghanistan. Displacement associated with Conflict and Violence Figure Analysis - GRID 2020, April 2020, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) Meeting 04 Sep 2019 at 09:00 AM in ACTED Kunduz Office 4 September 2019, [url](#), p. 1

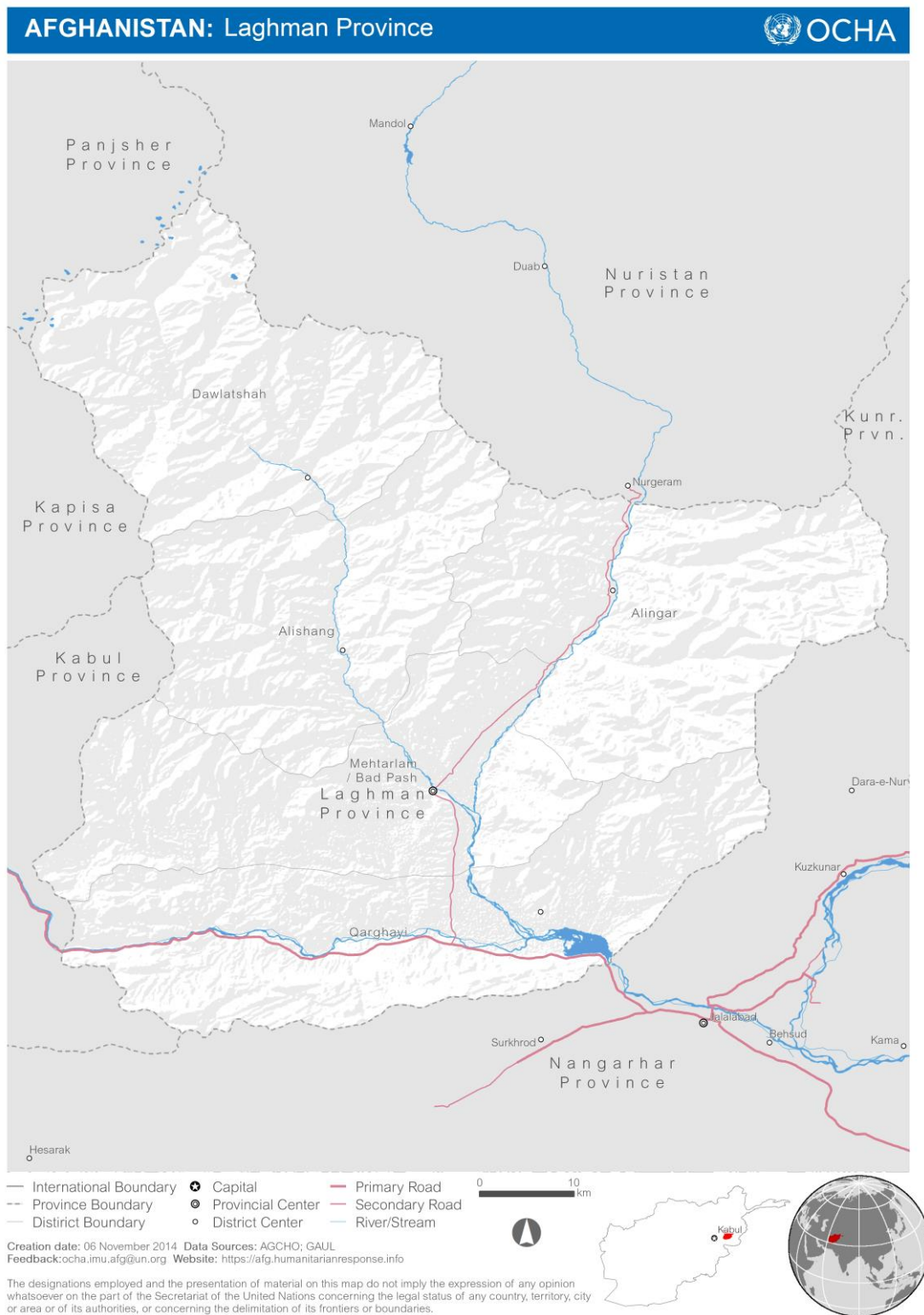
²³⁷⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#)

²³⁸⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²³⁸¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 - 11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 - 25 August 2019), 27 August 2019, [url](#)

2.21 Laghman

2.21.1 General description of the province



Map 21: Afghanistan – Laghman province, source: UNOCHA²³⁸²

²³⁸² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#);

Laghman is located in eastern Afghanistan and it borders on the provinces of Panjshir and Nuristan to the north, Kunar to the east, Nangarhar to the south, and Kabul and Kapisa to the west.²³⁸³ Laghman province is divided into the following administrative units: Alingar, Alishang, Dawlatshah, Mehtarlam, Qarghayi²³⁸⁴, and Bad Pash (also Bad Pakh); the latter became a district of its own in 2011. The provincial capital of Laghman is Mehtarlam.²³⁸⁵

According to Afghanistan NSIA, the population of Laghman is estimated at 493 488 in 2020/21²³⁸⁶ and is composed of majority Pashtuns, followed by Tajik and Pashai tribes.²³⁸⁷ The province is mostly mountainous, a fact that has favoured the insurgents in the past, who used to ‘flee into remote mountain ranges’, according to a report from 2014.²³⁸⁸

The Kabul-Jalalabad Highway passes through Qarghayi district²³⁸⁹, where a secondary road branches off to connect to Nurgeram in Nuristan via the provincial capital Mehtarlam.²³⁹⁰ Bad Pash district has been a strategic crossing-point for Afghan and foreign insurgents coming from the border area and moving deeper into Afghanistan.²³⁹¹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, opium-poppy cultivation levels in Laghman (2 092 hectares) remained similar to 2017 (2 257 hectares) with insignificant changes at district level.²³⁹² According to AAN, in 2019, opium poppy cultivation in the eastern provinces including in Laghman has decreased by 76 % compared to 2018.²³⁹³

2.21.2 Conflict background and actors in Laghman

According to Khaama Press reporting in October 2018, Laghman, which was described as one of the ‘relatively calm’ provinces of Afghanistan, has seen a rise in activities by Taliban and ISKP militants in some remote districts of the province.²³⁹⁴

Purportedly, Alingar district, which was mainly under the influence of the Taliban in the past, reportedly saw an increased presence of IS fighters, as reported in February 2018.²³⁹⁵ As of February 2019, the UN Secretary General described Laghman as one of the ISKP ‘strongholds’ in Afghanistan²³⁹⁶ operating in the mountainous Alingar and Chapa Dara districts.²³⁹⁷

In December 2019, ANSF killed 20 Taliban militants, including the shadow governor of Taliban for Laghman province, Zainulabidin.²³⁹⁸ The MoD published the names of some the Taliban militants who

²³⁸³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Laghman, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²³⁸⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²³⁸⁵ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Laghman, 2020, [url](#); Foschini, F., The Enteqal Seven (2): Around Mehtarlam, an ‘insurgency corridor’ in the making, AAN, 10 May 2011, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, n.d., [url](#), P. 16

²³⁸⁶ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, n.d., [url](#), P. 16

²³⁸⁷ [BMC](#), ‘The midwife helped me ... otherwise I could have died’: women’s experience of professional midwifery services in rural Afghanistan - a qualitative study in the provinces Kunar and Laghman, 6 March 2020, [url](#); [Pajhwok Afghan News](#), Background profile of Laghman province, n.d., [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Laghman Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²³⁸⁸ Stars and Stripes, Insurgents in Afghanistan’s Laghman province may win by not losing, 15 November 2014, [url](#)

²³⁸⁹ INSI, Country profile for Afghanistan, alerts, 7 February 2020, [url](#)

²³⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²³⁹¹ Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan’s most notorious hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url](#); Foschini, F., The Enteqal Seven (2): Around Mehtarlam, an ‘insurgency corridor’ in the making, AAN, 10 May 2011, [url](#)

²³⁹² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 23

²³⁹³ AAN, New world drug report: opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

²³⁹⁴ Khaama Press, Four key Taliban group leaders ambushed in Laghman province, 1 October 2018, [url](#)

²³⁹⁵ Salaam Times, Security forces launch operation in Laghman amid Taliban-ISIS clashes, 27 February 2018, [url](#)

²³⁹⁶ UN Secretary-General, Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 1 February 2019, [url](#), p. 7

²³⁹⁷ Salaam Times, Stepped up operations forces ISIS fighters to lay down arms in Laghman, 23 March 2020, [url](#)

²³⁹⁸ [Pajhwok Afghan News](#), 20 Taliban including shadow governor killed in Laghman airstrike, 27 December 2019, [url](#)

were killed during the strike including the aforementioned shadow governor, and Qari Saboor, the head of the Taliban red unit for Laghman province, Qari Saqib, a local Taliban group leader, Janatgul, a Taliban fighter, Qari Miraj, former shadow governor of Taliban for Alingar district, Ahmadshah, Taliban shadow district governor for Alingar district, Qari Anzargul, a Taliban group leader, Qari Mihrab, a Taliban platoon leader, Haji Ahmadshah, a Taliban group leader, Qari Ebrahim, a Taliban fighter, Fazal Rabi, a local Taliban fighter, Toheed, a Taliban fighter, Muheet, a Taliban fighter, Gulab, a Taliban fighter, Malang, a Taliban fighter.²³⁹⁹

In March 2020, ISKP shadow governor for Laghman province and 30 fighters of the group surrendered to ANSF.²⁴⁰⁰ During the same period, several media sources cited Noorullah Shirzada, from Agence France Press (AFP), showing in a photo the presence of Taliban fighters in Alingar district.²⁴⁰¹ In May 2020, Etilaatroz indicated that Taliban fighters had a widespread presence and carried out their activities in Mehtarlam district²⁴⁰² and in a number of other districts of Laghman province including Alishang district.²⁴⁰³ During this same period, the Taliban shadow governor for Laghman province was Mawlawi Abdul Hadi Pashayeewal²⁴⁰⁴, and the head of the Taliban military commission for the mentioned province was Mawlawi Qais. Taliban based in Alingar district were reportedly recruiting new fighters via mosques, Quranic and school, and amongst friends and relatives.²⁴⁰⁵ On 10 May 2020, ANSF killed Omar Khater, the Taliban intelligence chief for Laghman province.²⁴⁰⁶

According to information by the LWJ collected and presented in a map released on 6 July 2020, Alishang, Alingar and Dawlatshah districts of Laghman province were contested.²⁴⁰⁷

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Laghman province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.²⁴⁰⁸

2.21.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.21.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 282 civilian casualties, including 80 killed and 202 injured in Laghman province, which represents 4 % increase compared to 2018. The leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, Non-Suicide IEDs, and suicide IEDs.²⁴⁰⁹ According to SIGAR, RS (Resolute Support) recorded between 51 and 75 civilian casualties in Laghman province during the first quarter

²³⁹⁹ Afghanistan, MoD, List of the Taliban killed this morning in Laghman, 27 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁰⁰ Pajhwok, Senior figure among 30 IS rebels surrender in Laghman, 19 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁰¹ Salaam Times, Taliban, Al-Qaeda maintain “close ties” despite peace deal promises, 2 July 2020, [url](#); NYT, Taliban ramp up attacks on Afghans after Trump says “no violence”, 6 March 2020, [url](#); France24, Afghan Government set to release 1 500 prisoners, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁰² Etilaatroz, سه غیر نظامی در انفجاری در لغمان کشته شدند [informal translation: ‘three civilians killed in an explosion in Laghman, 2 May 2020], [url](#)

²⁴⁰³ Etilaatroz, ۲۱ سرباز ارتش در لغمان؛ ارگ: طالبان بر ادامه ی «افغان کشی» پافشاری دارند [informal translation: ‘killing of 21 army soldiers in Laghman; Presidential palace: Taliban insist on continuing ‘killing Afghans’, 22 May 2020], [url](#)

²⁴⁰⁴ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 27

²⁴⁰⁵ NYT, How the Taliban outlasted a superpower: tenacity and carnage, 26 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁰⁶ Reportedly, Security forces kill senior Taliban spy in Laghman, 10 May 2020, [url](#); Sputnik, Afghan Forces kill senior Taliban spy in Laghman province, 10 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁰⁷ LWJ, Several Districts Change Hands as Fighting Rages in Northern Afghanistan, 6 July 2020, [url](#), however the source does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated

²⁴⁰⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 13 and 59

²⁴⁰⁹ UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

of 2020²⁴¹⁰, and the mentioned source recorded between 76 and 100 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020.²⁴¹¹

According to ACLED data, between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 there were 292 security incidents recorded in Laghman province, of whom 198 were coded as battles, 77 remote violence and 17 incidents of violence against civilians.

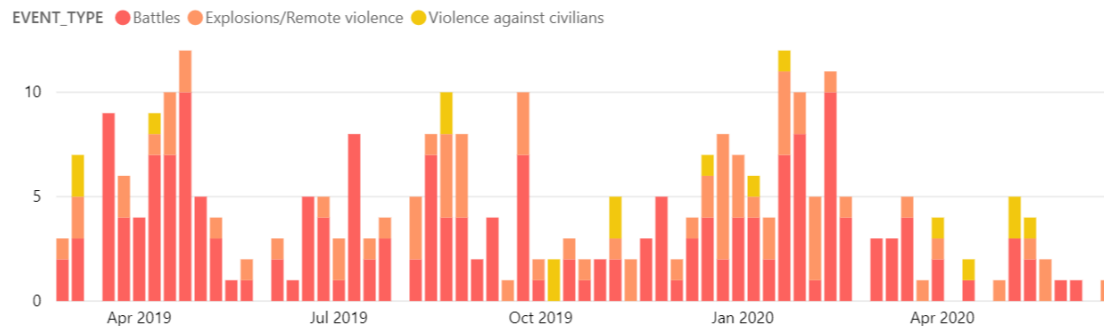


Figure 23. Laghman - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data²⁴¹²

In May 2020, clashes between ANSF and the Taliban took place in Alishang district.²⁴¹³ On 7 July 2020, Khaama Press cited 201st Corps stating that the Afghan security forces killed 16 Taliban fighters and wounded 6 others in Sarkund Baba area of Laghman province, situated on the highway between Kabul and Jalalabad.²⁴¹⁴

Recent incidents that caused civilian casualties in Laghman province in 2019 and 2020 include: in September 2019, seven members of a family were killed, and six others were wounded when a Taliban mortar hit their house in Alishang district²⁴¹⁵; in the same district in the area of Qalatak, in October 2019, three civilians were killed, and three others were wounded in an operation conducted by a Special Forces unit of NDS²⁴¹⁶; on 16 October 2019, two security forces and two civilians were killed, and six others were wounded when a car bomb exploded near the police headquarters of Alishang district.²⁴¹⁷ On 23 December 2019, three civilians were killed, and at least seven others were wounded in an explosion at a funeral ceremony of tribal leader in Laghman province²⁴¹⁸; on 2 May 2020, three civilians were killed in Mehtarlam after a bomb set in a motorcycle went off in front of the prison²⁴¹⁹; on 23 May 2020, four children below the age of six were killed after a mortar shell hit a residential house in Gerdi Saleb area of Alishang district.²⁴²⁰

2.21.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 4 816 persons displaced from Laghman province, with 98 % displaced within the province itself (mainly in the provincial capital

²⁴¹⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

²⁴¹¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

²⁴¹² Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Laghman; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹³ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 soldiers, as many Taliban killed in Laghman firefight, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁴ Khaama Press, 22 Taliban militants killed, wounded on Kabul-Jalalabad highway, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁸ 1TV, Three children killed in blast at funeral in Laghman, 23 December 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Three civilians killed in explosion at funeral in Laghman, 23 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 30 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁴¹⁹ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Explosion close to a prison leaves 3 dead in Laghman province of Afghanistan, 2 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁴²⁰ NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

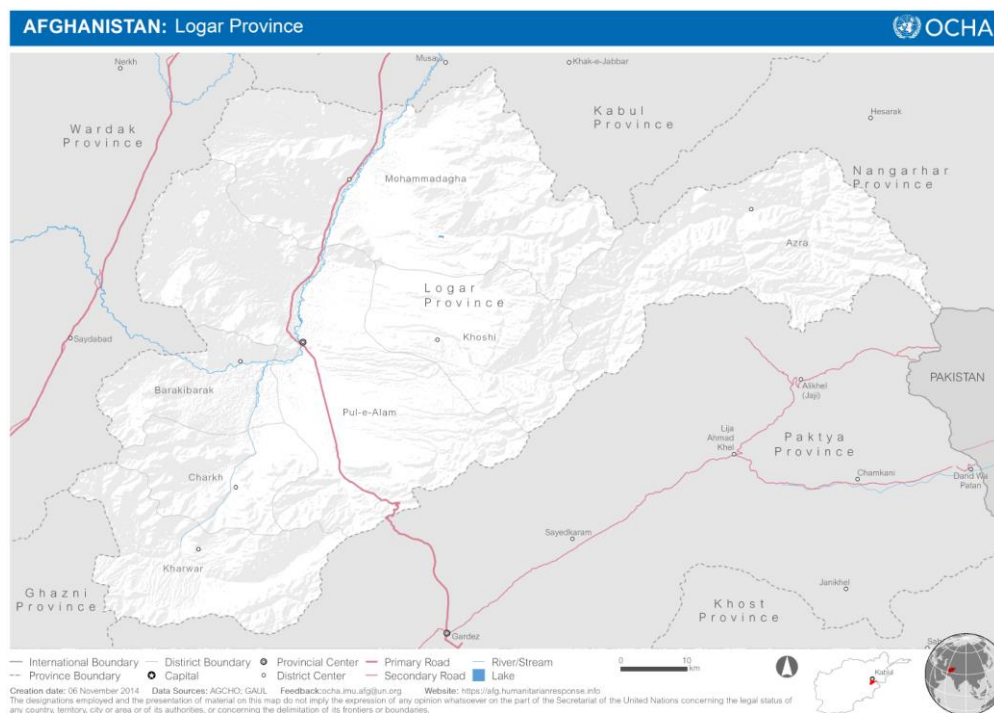
district of Mehtarlam and Bad Pash district), and the remaining 2 % were displaced into Panjshir and Parwan provinces.²⁴²¹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 4 809 persons displaced to Laghman province, with almost 98 % coming from within the province itself and 2 % from Kabul and Nangarhar provinces.²⁴²²

In December 2019, fighting and military operations continued in several eastern provinces including Laghman province.²⁴²³ During the first week of March 2020, around 2 296 people were displaced due to continued fighting in Alishang, Alingar and Mehterlam districts.²⁴²⁴ During the entire month of March clashes between ANSF and AGEs in Laghman province were reported.²⁴²⁵ During the period of 15 – 21 June 2020, at least 1 000 nomad families (7 000 people) were blocked in Laghman province due to the COVID-19 restrictions.²⁴²⁶

2.22 Logar

2.22.1 General description of the province



Map 22: Afghanistan – Logar province, source: UNOCHA²⁴²⁷

Logar province is located in the central region of Afghanistan, about 65 kilometres south of Kabul²⁴²⁸, and has borders with the provinces of Kabul to the north, Nangarhar to the north-east, Paktia to the

²⁴²¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴²² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴²³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 23 December – 29 December 2019, [url](#), p. 1

²⁴²⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 9 March – 15 March 2020, [url](#), p. p. 1

²⁴²⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 16 March – 22 March 2020, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 23 March – 29 March 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁴²⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 15 – 21 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁴²⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Logar Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁴²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Logar Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

south and south-east, Ghazni to the south-west and Wardak to the west.²⁴²⁹ Logar province is divided into the following administrative units: Azra, Baraki Barak, Charkh, Kharwar, Khoshi, Mohammad Agha and Pul-e Alam. The provincial capital of Logar is Pul-e Alam.²⁴³⁰ Azra district, in the eastern part of the province has an international border of a few kilometres with Pakistan's province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.²⁴³¹

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Logar province has a population of 434 374.²⁴³² Most of the province's population lives in the fertile plains of the Logar Valley.²⁴³³ The main ethnic groups in Logar are Pashtun, Tajik and Hazara.²⁴³⁴ Kharwar and Azra districts are entirely Pashtun-inhabited. Charkh district has a Tajik majority. In the remaining districts, Tajiks constitute between 20 and 40 % of the population.²⁴³⁵ Hazara reportedly reside in Khoshi and Pul-e Alam districts. Kuchi nomads can be found in Kharwar and Pul-e Alam districts. The majority of the population of Logar province are Sunni Muslim, but there are also Shia.²⁴³⁶ In January 2020, the detention of ethnic Pashtun activist Manzoor Pashteen reportedly caused protests in Logar province.²⁴³⁷

Logar connects Kabul to Afghanistan's south-eastern region, Greater (Loya) Paktya, through the Kabul-Gardez Highway that runs east from the main national ring road and over the Tera Pass, traversing the districts of Mohammad Agha and Pul-e Alam.²⁴³⁸ Logar province has no functioning airstrip and air traffic is regularly interrupted by bad weather conditions.²⁴³⁹

UNODC's Opium Survey from 2018 listed Logar province as poppy-free since 2013.²⁴⁴⁰ UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52 % reduction in opium poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region (including Logar province) and the central highlands.²⁴⁴¹

Logar province is rich in chromite ore, with deposits extracted illegally and smuggled to Pakistan.²⁴⁴² The province also houses the country's largest copper deposit, the mine of Mes Aynak in Mohammad Agha district.²⁴⁴³ Logar's natural resources have caused local rivalries over revenues coming from mineral deposits.²⁴⁴⁴ Due to shrinking resources, population growth and sedentarisation processes, the

²⁴²⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Logar Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁴³⁰ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Logar, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

²⁴³¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Logar Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Tolonews, Insecurity Hardens Access to Logar's Azra District, 30 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁴³² Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²⁴³³ Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴³⁴ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Logar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Logar Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#); Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴³⁵ Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴³⁶ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Logar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁴³⁷ RFE/RL, Detention of Ethnic Pashtun Activist Triggers Protests in Pakistan, Afghanistan, 28 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁴³⁸ Ali, O., The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar's Struggle Against the Taliban, AAN, 15 December 2014, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴³⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 11

²⁴⁴⁰ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

²⁴⁴¹ Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁴² Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar Province: Illegal Extraction of Logar Chromites Goes On, 6 October 2015, [url](#); VoA, Report: Militant Groups in Afghanistan Get Rich Off Mineral Smuggling, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

²⁴⁴³ Tolonews, Logar Security 'Improves' after More Forces Deployed, 4 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁴ Global Security Review, Are Afghanistan's Mineral Deposits an Answer to the Country's Economic Woes?, 9 June 2019, [url](#)

province has witnessed conflicts between nomads and settlers, for example in Azra²⁴⁴⁵ and Baraki Barak²⁴⁴⁶ districts.

2.22.2 Conflict background and actors in Logar

Logar province has served as a strategic crossing-point for Taliban fighters, not only due to its proximity to Kabul²⁴⁴⁷, but also because it provided easy access to AGEs' fronts in the nearby provinces of Nangarhar, Paktya, Paktika, Khost, Wardak and Ghazni, as well as in Pakistan.²⁴⁴⁸ Kharwar, a mountainous district in the south of the province, was among the first ones in the central region where Taliban groups started to reorganise in 2005.²⁴⁴⁹ According to a 2014 report by AAN's analyst Obaid Ali, the security situation in Logar province started to deteriorate in 2011. The districts of Azra, Baraki Barak, Charkh, Kharwar and Mohammad Agha were described as the areas worst hit by the Taliban.²⁴⁵⁰

In 2017, the situation in Logar was reported to have worsened²⁴⁵¹, with the Taliban's Miran Shah Shura, based in the region of North Waziristan in Pakistan and composed exclusively of Haqqani Network members, reportedly holding authority in the province.²⁴⁵² In 2019-2020, Logar is described as among the relatively volatile²⁴⁵³ and insecure²⁴⁵⁴ provinces in the central region of the country, 'where the Taliban have influence and control'²⁴⁵⁵, regularly attacking government forces in both the provincial capital and the districts.²⁴⁵⁶ In May 2020, the UN Security Council reported on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made in Logar province.²⁴⁵⁷

According to AAN analysts Ruttig and Sabawoon, Logar province, together with neighbouring provinces such as Wardak, western Nangarhar and Surobi district of Kabul province, are 'part of a belt that could cut off the capital from southern and eastern Afghanistan' if the security situation would escalate. Various causes for the continued insecurity throughout Logar are cited by local sources, such as the Taliban's resilient local structures in the province and a widespread regional sympathy for the Taliban, incompetent high government officials and a lack of proper coordination among security forces, government forces' harassment that pushes local people into the insurgency, as well as the hashish and chromite smuggling and the fight over its control. Security analysts describe Logar province as an example of 'statically disputed territory', without much change in territory and population control, but

²⁴⁴⁵ Giustozzi, A., Nomad-Settler Conflict in Afghanistan Today, AREU, October 2019, [url](#), p. 27

²⁴⁴⁶ Giustozzi, A., Nomad Sedentarisation Processes in Afghanistan and Their Impact on Conflict, AREU, September 2019, [url](#), p. 10

²⁴⁴⁷ Al Jazeera, Taliban Attack in Afghanistan's Logar Kills Eight Security Forces, 20 January 2019, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁸ Dorronsoro, G., The Taliban's Winning Strategy in Afghanistan, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009, [url](#), pp. 22, 28; Ali, O., The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar's Struggle Against the Taleban, AAN, 15 December 2014, [url](#)

²⁴⁴⁹ Elias, M.O.T., The Resurgence of the Taliban in Kabul: Logar and Wardak, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field, 2009, pp. 45-46, 52

²⁴⁵⁰ Ali, O., The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar's Struggle Against the Taleban, AAN, 15 December 2014, [url](#)

²⁴⁵¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, More than 50pc of Logar Being Controlled by Taliban, 26 June 2017, [url](#)

²⁴⁵² Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Organization and Structure, Landinfo, 23 August 2017, [url](#), p. 6

²⁴⁵³ Khaama Press, Coalition Airstrike Kills Taliban Leader Mullah Amin Gul and His 3 Comrades in Logar, 7 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁵⁴ Warden, S., Past as Prologue? What the Parliamentary Election Results Tell Us About the September Presidential Election, AAN, 23 August 2019, [url](#); Mashal, M., [Twitter], posted on: 1 July 2020, [url](#); Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁵⁵ An Afghan analyst Lifos spoke to in January 2020. Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 52

²⁴⁵⁶ Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁵⁷ UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9

with intensive fighting indicating that increasing efforts are needed from the actors in the conflict to hold their terrain.²⁴⁵⁸

Out of the six rural districts and the one surrounding Logar's capital Pul-e Alam, the government officially claims to control three: the provincial capital, Khoshi and Mohammad Agha. Security analysts and local sources, however, give a different picture.²⁴⁵⁹ An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated Kharwar, Charkh and Azra districts as 'Taliban-controlled' and Pul-e Alam, Mohammad Agha and Baraki Barak districts as 'contested'. A USDOD assessment of July 2019, reported by LWJ in the same map, designated Kharwar and Charkh districts as 'contested' and Azra district as 'government-influenced'. Khoshi district was categorised as 'government-controlled' or 'undetermined' in this assessment.²⁴⁶⁰ According to local sources, cited by AAN mid-July 2020, the Taliban are present in several villages just a few kilometres from the provincial capital, several areas in Mohammad Agha district are under Taliban control, heavy Taliban activity is reported in Baraki Barak, Charkh and Kharwar districts with the government only holding the district centres or small areas around them, Khoshi district is reportedly contested and the situation in Azra district is reported as volatile with the district centre besieged by the Taliban for the past 15 years.²⁴⁶¹

Media sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in the districts of Charkh²⁴⁶², Azra²⁴⁶³, Baraki Barak²⁴⁶⁴, Mohammad Agha²⁴⁶⁵, Kharwar²⁴⁶⁶ and Khoshi.²⁴⁶⁷ The area of Charkh district has long been largely Taliban controlled²⁴⁶⁸ and is described as one of Logar's most insecure districts.²⁴⁶⁹ According to a May 2019 USIP report, the Afghan government had a limited presence in Charkh district, retaining compounds in the district centre and controlling the main road, but its control remaining confined to its bases and checkpoints. District residents stated Taliban militants have returned soon whenever the government's military operations were concluded; adding that Taliban influence in the region has grown with relatives joining the militant group for the purpose of revenge.²⁴⁷⁰ The Taliban are reported to have established training centres in the district.²⁴⁷¹ Arab, Chechen, Uzbek and Pakistani militants (some of them affiliated with Al Qaeda²⁴⁷² - see below) have reportedly been seen in the Taliban's ranks in Charkh.²⁴⁷³ However, according to Charkh's district's governor, cited by Tolonews in April 2020, the centre of the district is under government control.²⁴⁷⁴ In June - July 2019, a Taliban

²⁴⁵⁸ Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁵⁹ Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁶⁰ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#) (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)

²⁴⁶¹ Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁶² Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign Militants Swell Taliban Ranks in Charkh District: Official, 30 April 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Afghan Forces Launch Operation in Taliban-Held District in Logar, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁶³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar's Azra District on the Verge of Collapse, 25 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar: 56 Militants Eliminated in Azra Offensive, 13 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁶⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt Unable to Collect Taxes in 5 Logar Districts, 9 October 2019, [url](#); AAN, The 'Reduction in Violence' Week: What Did (Some of the) People Think?, 28 February 2020, [url](#); Reportedly, Taliban Launch Awareness Campaign on Coronavirus, 30 March 2020, [url](#); 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](#)

²⁴⁶⁵ Tolonews, Logar Security 'Improves' after More Forces Deployed, 4 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁶⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt Unable to Collect Taxes in 5 Logar Districts, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁶⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt Unable to Collect Taxes in 5 Logar Districts, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁶⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign Militants Swell Taliban Ranks in Charkh District: Official, 30 April 2019, [url](#); Jackson, A., Perspectives on Peace from Taliban Areas of Afghanistan, USIP, May 2019, [url](#), p. 4; Tolonews, Afghan Forces Launch Operation in Taliban-Held District in Logar, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁶⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign Militants Swell Taliban Ranks in Charkh District: Official, 30 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁰ Jackson, A., Perspectives on Peace from Taliban Areas of Afghanistan, USIP, May 2019, [url](#), pp. 6, 12

²⁴⁷¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign Militants Swell Taliban Ranks in Charkh District: Official, 30 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁷² Khaama Press, Chechen and Chinese Militants Among Dozens Killed, Wounded in Logar Operation, 2 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁷³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign Militants Swell Taliban Ranks in Charkh District: Official, 30 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁴ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Launch Operation in Taliban-Held District in Logar, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

siege on the eastern district of Azra was reported.²⁴⁷⁵ Taliban militants reportedly seized all roads connecting the district with the rest of the province and closed several of them, hindering trade routes as well as residents' free movement.²⁴⁷⁶ Azra is described as 'a strategic district', from where the Taliban could threaten Kabul and other neighbouring provinces.²⁴⁷⁷ In Mohammad Agha district, the village of Surkhab is reported to be the most embattled area.²⁴⁷⁸ An important base for Taliban decision-making is located in Zurmat district of neighbouring Paktya province, bordering Logar's southern district of Kharwar, where Taliban militants from Logar province are reportedly active.²⁴⁷⁹ The Taliban are reportedly involved in disturbing security on the Kabul-Gardez Highway²⁴⁸⁰, running through the districts of Mohammad Agha and Pul-e Alam, regularly blocking the highway and pulling people from vehicles whom they suspect are government or NGO employees.²⁴⁸¹

Several prominent Taliban figures were reported to have been killed or arrested in various districts.²⁴⁸² In March 2019, two key Taliban commanders, known as Shafiqullah²⁴⁸³ and Abu Zar, reportedly involved in planning high-profile attacks²⁴⁸⁴, were killed in Mohammad Agha district. In the same month, notorious Taliban commander Qari Waqar, purportedly involved in the killing of several police officers, was detained in Logar's capital Pul-e Alam.²⁴⁸⁵ In April 2019, three prominent Taliban figures, including Qari Mohammad Yusuf and Mohammad Wali, were arrested²⁴⁸⁶ and Taliban group leader Mullah Amin Gul was killed²⁴⁸⁷ in the area of the provincial capital. In June 2019, the Afghan Ministry of Defence reported the killing of the Taliban's shadow governor for Logar province, known as Haji Lala, and his two deputies in Charkh district.²⁴⁸⁸ However, in August 2019, local officials in Logar claimed Haji Lala was killed in that month.²⁴⁸⁹ In July 2019, a group of senior Taliban leaders, including Red Unit commander Qudrat, the Taliban shadow district chief for Mohammad Agha district and the Taliban military commission chief for Khushi district, were reportedly killed in the outskirts of the provincial capital Pul-e Alam.²⁴⁹⁰ In August 2019, the Taliban's shadow district chief for Azra district, known as Maulvi Mohammadullah or Farooqi and reportedly leading a 45-member Taliban group, was killed in Pul-e Alam.²⁴⁹¹ In November 2019, a prominent Taliban commander known as Waisuddin was killed in Mohammad Agha district.²⁴⁹²

²⁴⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar's Azra District on the Verge of Collapse, 25 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar: 56 Militants Eliminated in Azra Offensive, 13 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar's Azra District on the Verge of Collapse, 25 June 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Insecurity Hardens Access to Logar's Azra District, 30 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar's Azra District on the Verge of Collapse, 25 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁸ Tolonews, Logar Security 'Improves' after More Forces Deployed, 4 May 2019, [url](#); Adili, A.Y. et al., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (10): What to Watch Out for on Election Day, AAN, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁷⁹ Bleuer, Ch. et al., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Insurgent-Controlled Zurmat District, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Militants Killed, 7 Captured in Logar Operation, 19 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁸¹ Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul's Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴⁸² See sources mentioned below.

²⁴⁸³ Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban Commander Identified as Shafiqullah Killed in Logar Province, 11 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁴ Khaama Press, Taliban's High-Profile Attack Planner Killed in Logar Airstrike, 21 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Commander Who Killed 10 Police Detained in Logar, 27 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁶ Khaama Press, 3 Prominent Taliban Leaders Arrested by Afghan Forces in Logar Province, 26 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁷ Khaama Press, Coalition Airstrike Kills Taliban Leader Mullah Amin Gul and His 3 Comrades in Logar, 7 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁸⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Shadow Governor for Logar Among Key Members Killed in Airstrike, 28 June 2019, [url](#);

Khaama Press, Airstrike Kills Taliban Shadow for Governor for Logar and His Two Deputies, 28 June 2019, [url](#); UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 10

²⁴⁸⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Governor for Logar Among 22 Militants Killed, 24 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁹⁰ Khaama Press, U.S. Airstrikes Kill Top Taliban Leaders in Logar Province, 16 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban District Chief Among 5 Killed in Logar Blitz, 18 August 2019, [url](#); UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 10

²⁴⁹² Tolonews, 'Taliban Commander' Killed in Logar Airstrike, 10 November 2019, [url](#)

According to the UN Security Council, ISKP has tried to expand its influence in the provinces of Logar and Paktya in the past, however without success.²⁴⁹³ Former Logar Taliban commander Abdul Hasib was reported to have taken over ISKP leadership for Afghanistan after leader Hafiz Saeed Khan was killed in July 2016. Abdul Hasib was killed in a joint Afghan and US operation in April 2017.²⁴⁹⁴ No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP have been recorded in Logar between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED. ACLED did record more than 30 incidents in which Taliban and/or ISKP militants were wounded and/or killed during military operations in all seven districts of Logar.²⁴⁹⁵ In June 2019, ANDSF forces arrested an ISKP commander, known as Shafi Gul and reportedly intending to recruit ISKP militants from Pul-e Alam City.²⁴⁹⁶

According to the UN Security Council, Al Qaeda is covertly active in 12 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, including in Logar.²⁴⁹⁷ In August 2019, a dozen Chechen and Chinese fighters, reportedly part of an Al Qaeda network, were killed alongside Taliban militants in Charkh district.²⁴⁹⁸ In October 2019, a prominent Haqqani commander, reportedly maintaining links with Al Qaeda, was killed in Mohammad Agha district, together with several Arab and Pakistani militants.²⁴⁹⁹ In May 2020, information reported to the UN Security Council suggested 'that discussions were held among senior Haqqani Network figures to form a new joint unit of 2 000 armed fighters in cooperation with and funded by Al Qaeda'. This newly established unit would be split into two operational zones with the forces in the Loya Paktya area (including Khost, Logar, Paktika and Paktya provinces) under Hafiz Azizuddin Haqqani's command.²⁵⁰⁰

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Logar is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps. Logar province is included in the Task Force Southeast (TF-Southeast), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TF-Southeast is led by US forces and has its headquarters in Paktya province.²⁵⁰¹ NDS unit 01, a paramilitary CIA-backed militia accused of human rights abuses, is reported to operate in the central region, including in Logar province.²⁵⁰² In May 2019, the deployment of additional ANDSF forces in the insecure parts of Logar province was reported.²⁵⁰³

²⁴⁹³ UNSC, Tenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2255 (2015) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 14; LWJ, UN: Islamic State Replaced Leader in Afghanistan after Visit from Central Leadership, 30 July 2019, [url](#); UNSC, Ninth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat, 31 July 2019, [url](#), p. 7

²⁴⁹⁴ USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, October 2019, [url](#), p. 294

²⁴⁹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁴⁹⁶ Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Foil ISIS Bid to Recruit Militants in Logar Province, 18 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁹⁷ UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 12

²⁴⁹⁸ Tolonews, 12 Chechen Fighters Affiliated to Al-Qaida Killed in Afghanistan, 2 August 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Chechen and Chinese Militants Among Dozens Killed, Wounded in Logar Operation, 2 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Mastermind Behind Kabul Bombings Killed, 26 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁰⁰ UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 13

²⁵⁰¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

²⁵⁰² Clark, K., CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitaries Accused of Grave Abuses: New Human Rights Watch Report, AAN, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁰³ Tolonews, Logar Security 'Improves' after More Forces Deployed, 4 May 2019, [url](#)

2.22.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.22.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 218 civilian casualties (95 deaths and 123 injured) in Logar province. This represents an increase of 52 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were air strikes, followed by ground engagements and targeted/deliberate killings.²⁵⁰⁴ Resolute Support²⁵⁰⁵ recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Logar province in the first quarter of 2020²⁵⁰⁶ and between 101 and 125 civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020.²⁵⁰⁷ Logar is mentioned as one out of four provinces (alongside Faryab, Laghman and Kunar) with a relatively high number of civilian casualties regarding to its population number.²⁵⁰⁸ Security analysts have registered an increased conflict activity in Logar, with peaks and intensified fighting recorded in 2019 and 2020. The number of security incidents in Logar in March 2020 was reportedly three and a half times higher than in March 2019.²⁵⁰⁹

ACLED collected data on 468 violent events in Logar province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 295 were coded as ‘battles’, 148 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 25 as ‘violence against civilians’. Pul-e Alam, where Logar’s provincial capital is located, stood out as the district where most incidents were reported, with 184 incidents recorded, followed by the districts of Mohammad Agha, Baraki Barak and Charkh. In Logar’s remaining districts, 16 or less incidents were reported. Most violent incidents in Logar province were recorded in the third quarter of 2019.²⁵¹⁰

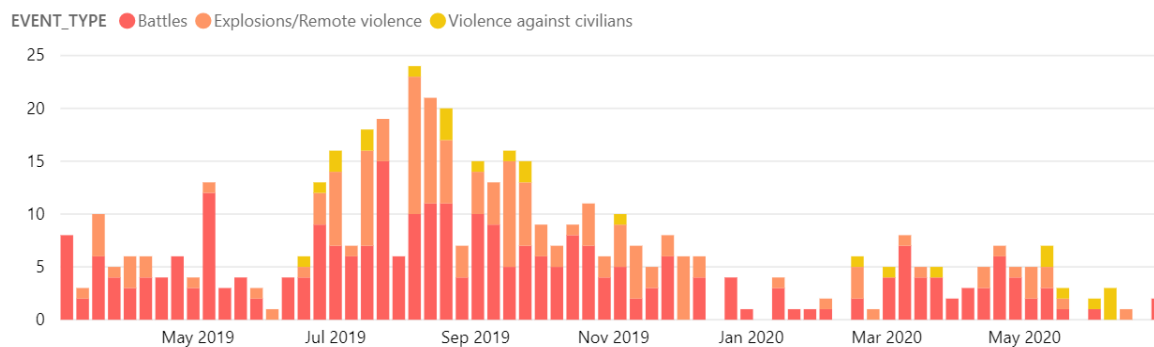


Figure 24. Logar - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data²⁵¹¹

ACLED coded around 63 % of the violent incidents in Logar as ‘battles’, all ‘armed clashes’. This category represented the most prevalent incident type in nearly all of Logar’s districts -with the exception of Azra district, where most incidents were registered under the category of ‘explosions/remote violence’. The majority of the armed clashes in Logar were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police and NDS personnel as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis* (the term *arbak* is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias).²⁵¹² Examples of such incidents included assaults on security checkpoints/outposts and headquarters in different areas near the provincial

²⁵⁰⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

²⁵⁰⁵ Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.

²⁵⁰⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

²⁵⁰⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

²⁵⁰⁸ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 19

²⁵⁰⁹ Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁵¹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁵¹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar, [url](#)

²⁵¹² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

capital Pul-e Alam in May 2019²⁵¹³, in August 2019²⁵¹⁴ and in April 2020²⁵¹⁵, in Azra district in July 2019²⁵¹⁶, in different areas (such as near the Mes Aynak copper mine) in Mohammad Agha district in August 2019²⁵¹⁷, in March 2020²⁵¹⁸ and in April 2020²⁵¹⁹, also in April 2020 in Charkh district²⁵²⁰ and in Baraki Barak district²⁵²¹; as well as attacks/ambushes on police convoys/vehicles in several areas around the provincial capital Pul-e Alam in July 2019²⁵²² and in April 2020.²⁵²³ No civilian casualties were reported in these incidents.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.²⁵²⁴ These incidents involved several operations in Mohammad Agha district, such as the killing of a prominent Taliban commander and several other militants in March 2019²⁵²⁵, the killing of dozens of Taliban militants (according to the Taliban, the people killed were civilians) in June 2019²⁵²⁶ and the killing and wounding of more than a dozen Taliban militants in a Special Forces' raid in May 2020.²⁵²⁷ In the area of the provincial capital Pul-e Alam, several Taliban leaders and militants were arrested and killed in operations in March²⁵²⁸, April²⁵²⁹, June²⁵³⁰ and September²⁵³¹ 2019. In Charkh district, dozens of AGEs were killed and wounded in several ANDSF operations in March²⁵³² and August 2019²⁵³³ and in January²⁵³⁴ and April²⁵³⁵ 2020. In operations in Azra district in July 2019 and in Baraki Barak district in August 2019 a militant's training centre was destroyed²⁵³⁶ and dozens of members from the Taliban's Red Unit were killed.²⁵³⁷ Some operations resulted in civilian casualties,

²⁵¹³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁵¹⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁵¹⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020 (updated 30 April 2020), [url](#)

²⁵¹⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁵¹⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019 (updated 26 September 2019), [url](#)

²⁵¹⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 Security Forces Killed in Logar, Helmand Attacks, 3 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), [url](#)

²⁵¹⁹ Reuters, Clashes Across Afghanistan Kill Dozens of Security Force Members, Militants, 22 April 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Trump, Qatar's Emir Talk Amid Taliban Attacks Across Afghanistan, 23 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁵²⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020 (updated 30 April 2020), [url](#); RFE/RL, Taliban Kills Nine Afghan Soldiers in Attack on Army Post, 16 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁵²¹ Tolonews, 7 Afghan Forces Killed in Taliban Attack in Logar: Tribal Elders, 26 April 2020, [url](#); Ariana News, Taliban Captures Police Outpost - Logar, 26 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁵²² Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP Commander for Logar Killed in Taliban Attack, 7 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁵²³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020 (updated 30 April 2020), [url](#)

²⁵²⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁵²⁵ Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban Commander Identified as Shafiullah Killed in Logar Province, 11 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁵²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 Militants Killed in Logar Offensive, 7 June 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban Militants Suffer Heavy Casualties in Logar Operations, 8 June 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban Militants Suffer Heavy Casualties in Special Forces Raid in Logar, 17 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁵²⁷ Khaama Press, 11 Taliban Militants Killed, 4 Wounded in Special Forces Raid in Logar, 10 May 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Nearly a Dozen Taliban Killed in Logar Raid, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁵²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Commander Who Killed 10 Police Detained in Logar, 27 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁵²⁹ Khaama Press, 3 Prominent Taliban Leaders Arrested by Afghan Forces in Logar Province, 26 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁵³⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Militants Killed, 7 Captured in Logar Operation, 19 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁵³¹ Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill 11 Taliban Militants, Destroy Weapons Cache in Logar, 21 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁵³² Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Among Dozens Killed in Latest Military Operations, 8 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁵³³ Khaama Press, Chechen and Chinese Militants Among Dozens Killed, Wounded in Logar Operation, 2 August 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, 12 Chechen Fighters Affiliated to Al-Qaida Killed in Afghanistan, 2 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁵³⁴ Khaama Press, Afghan Military Operations Kill 8 Taliban Militants, 17 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁵³⁵ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Launch Operation in Taliban-Held District in Logar, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁵³⁶ Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces Destroy Suicide Bombers Training Centre in Logar, 13 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁵³⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar: 56 Militants Eliminated in Azra Offensive, 13 July 2019, [url](#)

such as a CIA-backed operation in the Padkhab area of the provincial capital in May 2019²⁵³⁸ and an NDS operation in Daudkhel village in the outskirts of Pul-e Alam City in August 2019.²⁵³⁹

Air/drone strikes represented 16 % of all reported violent incidents in Logar. Most air/drone strikes were carried out in Pul-e Alam district (one out of three), followed by Baraki Barak and Charkh districts. The majority of these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces, some were attributed to NATO forces.²⁵⁴⁰ While these air/drone strikes mostly inflicted losses among AGEs in the aforementioned districts²⁵⁴¹, some also caused civilian casualties –such as an American drone strike targeting a gathering of tribal elders in the Padkhab-e Shana area of Pul-e Alam City, in April 2019²⁵⁴²; an American drone strike targeting a Taliban gathering in the Kamalkhel neighbourhood of Pul-e Alam City killing two children, in July 2019²⁵⁴³; and an American air strike targeting a tent of Kuchi nomads in the Khaki Dag area of Baraki Barak district, in July 2019.²⁵⁴⁴ In November 2019, four ANA soldiers were reportedly killed in ‘friendly fire’ from an American air strike in the Bazar-e Zekher area of Pul-e Alam City.²⁵⁴⁵

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented 10 % of all reported security incidents in Logar. The majority of IED incidents were registered in the districts of Pul-e Alam and Mohammad Agha, followed by Baraki Barak and Charkh.²⁵⁴⁶ For example in March 2019, the police chief of Baraki Barak was killed and several other police officers were wounded when a bomb attached to their vehicle exploded in the Sherwazi area of the district.²⁵⁴⁷ In August 2019, a police vehicle on patrol was hit by a roadside bomb in the Mes Aynak area of Mohammad Agha district, resulting in several ANP casualties.²⁵⁴⁸ Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. This happened in June 2019 in Charkh district, when a roadside bomb planted by the Taliban hit a civilian vehicle.²⁵⁴⁹ In September 2019, several civilians were killed by Taliban-claimed car bombs²⁵⁵⁰ and by a bomb detonating near a mosque after Friday prayer²⁵⁵¹ in Pul-e Alam district.

²⁵³⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Civilians Killed in Logar Raid, NATO Denies, 5 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁵³⁹ Tolonews, Investigative Report Confirms Civilian Casualties in Logar, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁵⁴¹ Khaama Press, Coalition Airstrike Kills Taliban Leader Mullah Amin Gul and His 3 Comrades in Logar, 7 April 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Airstrike Kills Taliban Shadow for Governor for Logar and His Two Deputies, 28 June 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, U.S. Airstrikes Kill Top Taliban Leaders in Logar Province, 16 July 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, U.S. Airstrikes Kill At Least 30 Taliban Militants in Logar Province, 8 August 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Mastermind Behind Kabul Bombings Killed, 26 October 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, 'Taliban Commander' Killed in Logar Airstrike, 10 November 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Video: Precision Airstrikes Kill 10 Taliban Militants, Wound 16 in Logar, 19 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁴² Pajhwok Afghan News, Tribal Elders Among 4 Killed in Logar Airstrike, 7 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 5-11, 11 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁴³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁴ RFE/RL, At Least Seven Civilians Killed in Air Strike in Eastern Afghanistan, 22 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁵ VoA, Officials: US Airstrike Mistakenly Kills 4 Afghan Soldiers, 12 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Baraki Barak Police Chief Killed in Bomb Blast, 18 March 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 15-21, 22 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019 (updated 26 September 2019), [url](#)

²⁵⁴⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Civilians Killed in Landmine Blast in Logar, 6 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 31-June 6, 6 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019 (updated 26 September 2019), [url](#); Tolonews, Explosion in Logar Kills Four Civilians, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁵¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019 (updated 26 September 2019), [url](#)

ACLED coded 6 % of the violent incidents in Logar as ‘shelling, artillery and missile attacks’.²⁵⁵² Some of these incidents resulted in civilian casualties –for example in December 2019, when a mortar fired by the American forces hit a civilian house in Baraki Barak district²⁵⁵³; in February and March 2020, when mortar shell leftovers exploded in Charkh²⁵⁵⁴ and Azra²⁵⁵⁵ districts, killing two children; and in May 2020, when a Taliban-fired mortar landed on a civilian house in Azra district.²⁵⁵⁶ In June 2020, a rocket fired by the Taliban impacted the provincial hospital in Pul-e Alam district.²⁵⁵⁷ In July 2020, several mortars were fired at Ashraf Ghani and his delegation when the President visited his home province; no casualties were reported.²⁵⁵⁸

ACLED categorised 5 % of all reported violent incidents in Logar as ‘violence against civilians’.²⁵⁵⁹ These incidents involved shootings by unidentified gunmen of a well-known religious scholar in the main mosque of Pul-e Alam in May 2019²⁵⁶⁰, of the executive head of Mohammad Agha district also in May 2019²⁵⁶¹, of an appellate court judge for Paktya province in his home in Mohammad Agha district in September 2019²⁵⁶² and of a civil society activist in Pul-e Alam in March 2020²⁵⁶³; Taliban ambushes and killings of two engineers working for the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Pul-e Alam City in June 2019²⁵⁶⁴ and of several judges and a court staff member in Mohammad Agha district in November 2019²⁵⁶⁵; a night raid carried out by Afghan and foreign forces in the Babos area of Pul-e Alam City in August 2019, killing one civilian and wounding four others²⁵⁶⁶; the execution of two sisters by the Taliban in Mohammad Agha district in June 2020²⁵⁶⁷; the kidnapping and killing of a former senator for Logar province by the Taliban also in June 2020²⁵⁶⁸; and the shooting of a female provincial council member in Pul-e Alam in July 2020.²⁵⁶⁹

Logar’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 reached around 15 %.²⁵⁷⁰ AAN related Logar’s below average voter registration to the ‘high insecurity’ in the province.²⁵⁷¹ At the end of polling day, Minister of Defence Asadullah Khaled mentioned Logar as one of the seven ‘most threatened provinces’ on 28 September.²⁵⁷² In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 51-75 % of respondents in Logar province reported to

²⁵⁵² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁵⁵³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019 (updated 30 December 2019), [url](#); Tolonews, ‘Four Civilians Killed in Logar Mortar Attack’: Residents, 10 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020 (updated 27 February 2020), [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Children Killed, 8 Injured in Logar Mortar Shell Blast, 10 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (9 - 15 March 2020), 15 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁶ Afghanistan Times, Child killed in Taliban Mortar Attack in Logar, 9 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2020: 1 January - 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 19

²⁵⁵⁸ Tolonews, Ghani, Fired at During Logar Visit, Pledges Increased Security, 1 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁵⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Deputy Head of Logar Ulema Council Shot Dead, 8 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Seeking Revenge, Taliban Target Afghan Soldiers’ Families, 10 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁶¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Mohammad Agha District Official Gunned Down, 4 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁶² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019 (updated 26 September 2019), [url](#)

²⁵⁶³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians, Civil Society Activists gunned Down in Pul-i-Alam, 29 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar: 2 Engineers Killed in Taliban Attack, 26 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Appellant Court Judges Killed in Taliban Ambush, 7 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Execute 2 Young Sisters in Logar, 7 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁸ Ariana News, Taliban Kill Former Afghan Senator in Logar: Local Officials, 9 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁶⁹ Tolonews, Logar Provincial Council Member Shot, Wounded, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁷⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 98

²⁵⁷¹ Warden, S., Past as Prologue? What the Parliamentary Election Results Tell Us About the September Presidential Election, AAN, 23 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁷² Ruttig, T. and Bjelica, J., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (11): A First Look at How E-Day Went, AAN, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

have experienced fear while voting.²⁵⁷³ According to the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA), Logar was one out of seven provinces where most polling stations remained closed on voting day.²⁵⁷⁴ Without providing further details, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on the killing of an unspecified number of Taliban militants on polling day in Logar province.²⁵⁷⁵

In September and October 2019, dozens of schools were reportedly closed down by the Taliban in Logar province. According to government officials, the forced closures were a response from the militants to newly established government checkpoints in the area.²⁵⁷⁶ Logar's Director of Education related the closures to the presidential elections, confirming that the Taliban had warned school authorities to close their facilities.²⁵⁷⁷ A member of Logar's provincial council suggested a punitive reason, resulting from a possible reduced Taliban recruitment in the region or from the militant group's unacceptance of government influence over the schools in the areas under their control. A Taliban spokesperson stated the religious educational centres and *madrastas* were closed down because they were not in line with the group's doctrine.²⁵⁷⁸ In its January 2020 Monthly Humanitarian Update, UNOCHA listed Logar as third in the top three provinces with the highest number of schools closed or damaged by conflict.²⁵⁷⁹

In November 2019, the alleged sexual abuse of hundreds of boys from several schools in rural areas of Logar province by teachers, older students, authority figures and extended family members was reported by an Afghan civil society organisation.²⁵⁸⁰ According to an administrator of one of the schools cited by the New York Times, 'three boys who had reported rapes were later killed by the Taliban, who condemn the sexual abuse as anti-Islamic.'²⁵⁸¹ After the allegations were made public, two activists in Logar were detained by the Afghan intelligence service²⁵⁸² and forced to confess their accusations were untrue²⁵⁸³. After pressure from the US and international human rights groups, the activists were released²⁵⁸⁴ and reportedly left the country short after.²⁵⁸⁵ At the end of January 2020, Afghanistan's Attorney General's Office (AOG) opened an investigation.²⁵⁸⁶ According to UNAMA, it is unclear whether this case has a conflict-nexus, however the UN mission continues to follow up on the allegations and investigation.²⁵⁸⁷

2.22.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 1 925 persons displaced from Logar, from whom the majority (1 155) found refuge within the province itself (in Pul-e Alam district). The remaining 770 IDPs from Logar sought shelter in the neighbouring provinces of Kabul (Kabul district), Khost (Khost Matun district) and Paktya (Gardez district). The majority of IDPs in Logar province were displaced from Baraki Barak district (1 176 individuals), followed by the districts of Mohammad Agha, Charkh, Kharwar and Khoshi. In the first three days of January 2020, UNOCHA

²⁵⁷³ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 62

²⁵⁷⁴ AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, [url](#), p. 11

²⁵⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 Killed, 123 Wounded in Election Day Attacks, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁷⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Regional Team (HRT) - Central Region - Meeting Summary, 6 October 2019, [url](#), p. 1; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2019, [url](#), p. 154

²⁵⁷⁷ 1TV, Taliban Force Schools in Central Afghan District to Close, 21 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁷⁸ Tolonews, Taliban Close 29 Government-Sponsored Madrasas in Logar, 17 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁷⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Monthly Humanitarian Update (January 2020), 11 February 2020, [url](#), p. 1

²⁵⁸⁰ Guardian (The), Afghanistan Paedophile Ring May Be Responsible for Abuse of 500 Boys, 13 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁸¹ NYT, 3 Afghan Schools, 165 Accounts of Students Being Raped, 25 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁸² Guardian (The), Whistle-blowers on School Paedophile Ring in Afghanistan Arrested, 25 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁸³ NYT, U.S. Envoy Says Afghans Coerced Retraction of Rape Allegations, 26 November, [url](#)

²⁵⁸⁴ RFE/RL, Afghanistan Releases Activists Who Exposed Alleged Paedophile Ring, 27 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁸⁵ Guardian (The), Investigation Begins into Alleged Abuse of More Than 500 Boys in Afghanistan, 29 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁸⁶ Guardian (The), Investigation Begins into Alleged Abuse of More Than 500 Boys in Afghanistan, 29 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁸⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 107

registered a peak of 490 IDP's coming from Baraki Barak, Mohammad Agha and Kharwar districts, all finding refuge in Pul-e Alam district.²⁵⁸⁸

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Logar province from other provinces was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020.²⁵⁸⁹

In the last week of October 2019, local authorities in Logar reported to UNOCHA about the arrival of around 130 IDP families in Pul-e Alam district, coming from insecure areas in Khoshi, Charkh and Baraki Barak districts.²⁵⁹⁰ During the last two weeks of March 2020, UNOCHA reported on the displacement of approximately 350 families due to conflict in Logar province.²⁵⁹¹

IOM ranked Pul-e Alam district 20th out of the countrywide top 25 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs, adding that over 85 % of IDPs from Logar have not returned home.²⁵⁹² A 2019 study from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) related the prolonged displacement of IDPs from Logar province to insecurity, lack of employment opportunities and inadequate access to public services such as education.²⁵⁹³ According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Logar province resided in Pul-e Alam district, followed by Khoshi and Mohammad Agha districts.²⁵⁹⁴

²⁵⁸⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

²⁵⁹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 March - 5 April 2020), 5 April 2020, [url](#), p. 2

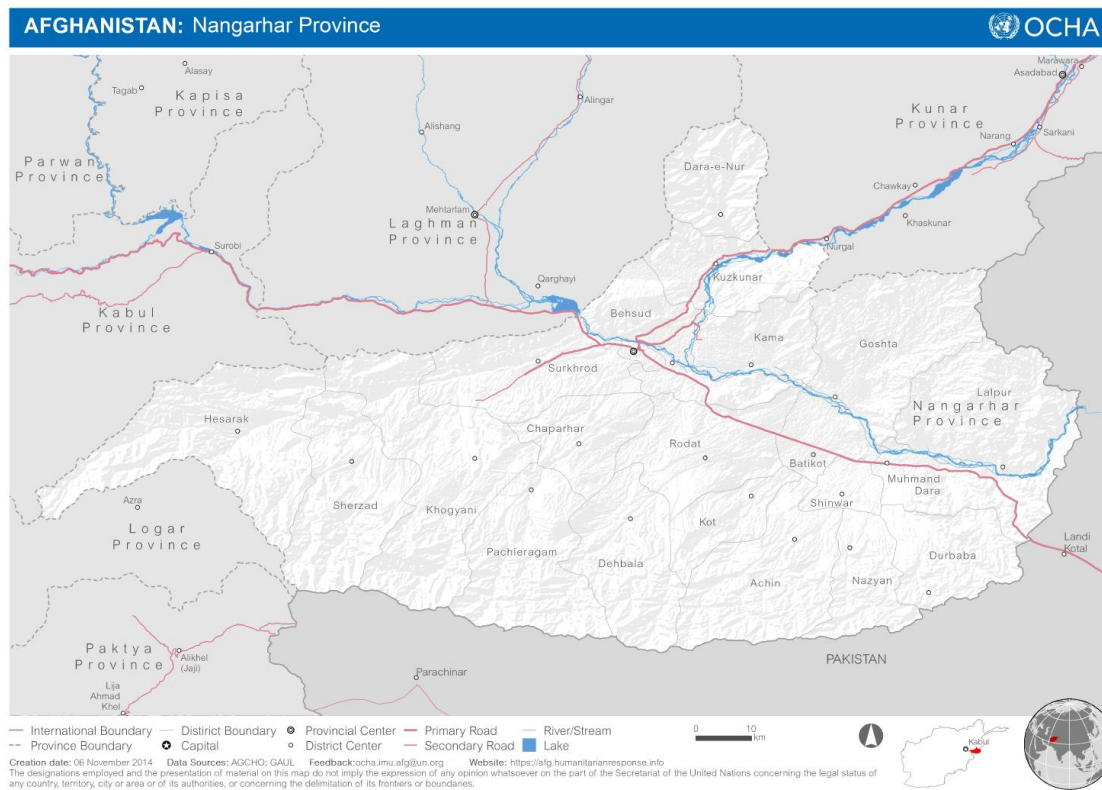
²⁵⁹² IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results March - June 2019, 1 July 2019, [url](#), pp. 6-7

²⁵⁹³ NRC and IDMC, Stuck in the Mud: Urban Displacement and Tenure Security in Kabul's Informal Settlements, 2019, [url](#), p. 6

²⁵⁹⁴ IOM, Afghanistan - Logar Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 6; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) I June 2019 I Province: Logar, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

2.23 Nangarhar

2.23.1 General description of the province



Map 23: Afghanistan – Nangarhar province, source: UNOCHA²⁵⁹⁵

Nangarhar is located in eastern Afghanistan, along the Afghan-Pakistani border. It borders Laghman and Kunar to the north, Pakistan to the east and south, and Logar and Kabul to the west.²⁵⁹⁶ The provincial capital of Nangarhar is Jalalabad.²⁵⁹⁷ The province is divided into the following administrative units: Achin, Batikot, Behsud, Chaparhar, Dara-i Nur, Dehbala (also known as Haska Mena), Durbaba, Goshta, Hesarak, Jalalabad, Kama, Khogyani, Kot, Kuzkunur, Lalpur, Muhmand Dara, Nazyan, Pachieragam (sometimes spelled 'Pachir Wa Agam'²⁵⁹⁸), Rodat, Sherzad, Shinwar (also known as Ghanikhel) and Surkhrod.²⁵⁹⁹ The NSIA also mentions a district named Spinghar but defines it as 'temporary'.²⁶⁰⁰

According to the NSIA, the population of Nangarhar is estimated at 1 701 698 for 2020/21. The rural population accounts for about 80 % of the total.²⁶⁰¹ The population is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Pashai, Arabs and Tajiks.²⁶⁰² As for the local Sikh and Hindu community, which used to be particularly present in and nearby Jalalabad, many of its members have been leaving Afghanistan due

²⁵⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nangarhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#);

²⁵⁹⁶ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nangarhar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁷ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Nangarhar, n. d., [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁸ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangrahar, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁵⁹⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 14-15; Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Nangarhar, 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nangarhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nangarhar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Kazemi, S. R. and Soroush, R., One Land, Two Rules (4): Delivering public services in embattled Achin district in Nangrahar province, AAN, 25 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁰⁰ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 15

²⁶⁰¹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²⁶⁰² US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nangarhar Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

to insecurity and government's indifference. In late September 2018, only 60 families of the community still lived in Nangarhar.²⁶⁰³ According to Afghanistan's expert Antonio Giustozzi, as of May 2019, there were also about 100 000 nomad families in Nangarhar.²⁶⁰⁴

The Regional Highway 05 (RH05) starts from Kabul²⁶⁰⁵ and passes through the districts of Surkhrod, Jalalabad, Behsud, Rodat, Batikot, Shinwar, Muhmand Dara, before reaching the Afghan-Pakistani border at Torkham.²⁶⁰⁶ An improvement project of the Kabul-Jalalabad Highway, conducted by a Chinese company, has fallen behind for years, reportedly due to corruption and negligence.²⁶⁰⁷ In August 2019, Turkish news site TRTWorld reported that the road going through Surkhrod, Khogyani and Sherzad districts was mostly paved but remained 'one of the most dangerous' in the country due to the presence of several militant groups and numerous IEDs.²⁶⁰⁸

The province, which borders the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan²⁶⁰⁹ (now merged with Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province)²⁶¹⁰, has served as an unofficial crossing-point for local and foreign militants.²⁶¹¹ As of 2020, London School of Economics' expert David Mansfield listed Garo, Dawtakhel, Ghwaraky, Kama Dakah, Sasobai and Tabai as unofficial crossings, some of them being hubs for all types of illicit traffics, such as cooking products or car parts.²⁶¹²

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Nangarhar was the leading poppy-cultivating province in the eastern region, even though the cultivation rate had decreased by 9 %, compared to 2017.²⁶¹³ Based on updated data supplied by UNODC, AAN mentioned that during 2019, the area under poppy cultivation had dropped by 82 % in Nangarhar. This 'unprecedented' decrease was attributed to both falling prices and ongoing conflict.²⁶¹⁴ Nevertheless, a May 2020 UN Security Council report mentioned that narcotic networks were still active in Nangarhar and smuggled drug into Pakistan 'with the reported acquiescence of security officials'.²⁶¹⁵ Tolonews also reported about the illegal mining of precious and semi-precious stones in Goshta district.²⁶¹⁶

2.23.2 Conflict background and actors in Nangarhar

Several sources stated between 2016 and 2018 that Nangarhar had been observing a deterioration of its political and security situation since 2011.²⁶¹⁷

²⁶⁰³ Foschini, F., The Other Fold of the Turban: Afghanistan's Hindus and Sikhs, AAN, 23 September 2013, [url](#); Australian Institute of International Affairs, A Precarious State: the Sikh Community in Afghanistan, 11 July 2018, [url](#); Salam Watandar, Sikhs and Hindus of Nangarhar leaving Afghanistan, 23 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁶⁰⁴ Giustozzi, A., Nomad-settler conflict in Afghanistan today, AREU, 13 November 2019, [url](#), p. 14

²⁶⁰⁵ Italy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Evaluation Report - Afghanistan: Rehabilitation of Maidan Shar – Bamyar Road, 2014, [url](#), p. 7

²⁶⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nangarhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁶⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Construction of second lane Kabul-Jalalabad Road faces hurdles, 22 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁰⁸ TRTWorld, On the frontiers of Afghanistan's most dangerous districts for civilians, 2 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁰⁹ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#)

²⁶¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Shaping a New Peace in Pakistan's Tribal Areas, 20 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁶¹¹ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#); New Arab (The), In Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, violence is committed by all sides, 25 January 2018, [url](#)

²⁶¹² Mansfield, D., Business as Usual: The Uninterrupted Illicit Supply Chain across the Borders of Afghanistan, Medium, 5 May 2020, [url](#); Mansfield, D., Mules, Pick-ups and Container Traffic: Cross-Border Production and Trade and the Shaping of the Political Economy of Nangarhar, AREU, 6 July 2020, [url](#), p. 16

²⁶¹³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 23

²⁶¹⁴ Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁶¹⁵ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 15

²⁶¹⁶ Tolonews, Report Shows Illegal Mining in Nangarhar, 28 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁶¹⁷ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#); TBIJ, Nangarhar: Descent into chaos, 30 July 2018, [url](#); New Arab (The), In Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, violence is committed by all sides, 25 January 2018, [url](#)

ISKP has been active in Nangarhar since 2015, when it formally announced its foundation. It was originally composed of Pakistani militants who had settled in the south-eastern districts of the province after the Pakistani army had ousted them from the tribal areas.²⁶¹⁸ In several reports focused on the rise of ISKP, AAN underscored the impact of the corruption of the provincial elite (especially under governor Gul Agha Sherzai's rule between 2005 and 2013), and of the concentration of development projects and aid funds in Jalalabad area. It undermined the people's trust in the Afghan government and left the population unprotected against insurgents. Moreover, the decrease in international combat forces in the province, starting from 2013, led to a considerable loss of territorial control by the Afghan government, mainly in the districts along the Spin Ghar mountain range in the south and the east of the province. Meanwhile, the local Taliban were 'fractured as well and lacked control over their forces', with fighters engaging in criminal activities and violence against civilians. Consequently, the Taliban could never take advantage of the political and military vacuum in the province, many of their fighters eventually defecting to ISKP. ISKP also benefitted from the breakdown of rural society and the erosion of tribal social structures in Nangarhar (particularly in the traditional area of the Shinwari tribe). Local communities were indeed left vulnerable to pressure from local and foreign insurgents.²⁶¹⁹

Resorting to extreme violence, ISKP was able to stay in control of remote areas of Nangarhar – notably in Achin – for several years, despite intense air strike campaigns which targeted its local commanders. It also transformed villages into training and logistical centres.²⁶²⁰ Nangarhar University, in Jalalabad, was among the three universities which provided ISKP with the most recruits.²⁶²¹ In this regard, Foreign Policy reported in January 2020 that in both Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, some Salafist madrasas, funded by Gulf states-based NGOs, were supporting ISKP activities.²⁶²² Although Nangarhar was still described as one of the ISKP 'strongholds' in Afghanistan by February 2019²⁶²³, from the fall of 2019, military operations simultaneously led by ANDSF, coalition forces and the Taliban pressured the group into leaving the areas under its control in southern Nangarhar and in Kunar.²⁶²⁴ Meanwhile, ANDSF made 'hundreds of arrests' during operations against ISKP sleeper cells in Jalalabad and Kabul. According to the UN Security Council, between September and November 2019, ISKP fighters were reduced from 1 750 across seven districts of Nangarhar to less than 200, concentrated in the Takhto area of Achin district.²⁶²⁵ By November 2019, ISKP had been 'nearly eradicated from its main Afghan base in Nangarhar'.²⁶²⁶ In this regard, Obaid Ali stressed the importance of ISKP's unpopularity in Nangarhar in its defeat, since it could not rely of locals' support.²⁶²⁷

The UN Security Council added that by the end of February 2020, over 1 400 ISKP members – mainly families – had surrendered after the group had been driven out of Nangarhar.²⁶²⁸ However, Obaid Ali noted that in early 2020, 'small groups of 15-20 ISKP fighters [were still operating] in some remote

²⁶¹⁸ Osman, B., The Islamic State in 'Khorasan': How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar, AAN, 27 July 2016, [url](#)

²⁶¹⁹ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#); Kazemi, S. R. and Soroush, R., One Land, Two Rules (4): Delivering public services in embattled Achin district in Nangrahar province, AAN, 25 March 2019, [url](#); Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 22

²⁶²⁰ Washington Post (The), Afghanistan claims the Islamic State was 'obliterated.' But fighters who got away could stage a resurgence, 9 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁶²¹ Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 11

²⁶²² FP, In Afghanistan, Religious Schools Are a Breeding Ground for Islamic State Influence, 24 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁶²³ UN Secretary-General, Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 1 February 2019, [url](#), p. 7

²⁶²⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security & Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 28

²⁶²⁵ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 17-19

²⁶²⁶ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-4; Diplomat (The), Islamic State's Lingering Legacy in Afghanistan, 5 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁶²⁷ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangrahar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁶²⁸ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 17

areas of Deh Bala, Pachir wa Agam and Khogyani districts²⁶²⁹, while their presence was also reported in the mountainous areas of Achin district.²⁶³⁰ In April 2020, an NDS official quoted by the Diplomat stated that ISKP fighters still hiding in Nangarhar had been left without command centre.²⁶³¹

Regarding the Taliban, as of May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mullah Mohammad Essa, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the shadow governor of Nangarhar. He was appointed after the ‘reshuffle’ of the Taliban government structure during the 2019-2020 winter, ahead of the 2020 fighting season.²⁶³² According to an Afghanistan analyst interviewed in January 2020 by Lifos, Sweden’s Country of Origin Information Centre, the Taliban were able to consolidate their presence in areas that they cleared from ISKP and thus were the strongest armed group in Nangarhar.²⁶³³ However, in March 2020, AAN’s expert Obaid Ali assessed the movement as ‘weak’ in Nangarhar – as it had to mobilize troops from other provinces to expel ISKP – and expressed doubts about its ability to gain more territory.²⁶³⁴ The Taliban reportedly set up a system of taxation of smuggling goods across eight of Nangarhar’s southern districts, Hesarak and Sherzad districts being the local centre of their narcotics activity.²⁶³⁵ The UN Security Council indeed suggested that behind the Taliban’s determination to dislodge ISKP from Nangarhar was their will to retake control of local smuggling routes and poppy-cultivating areas.²⁶³⁶ According to a USIP survey conducted in eight Afghan provinces throughout 2018, Nangarhar was the province with the highest number of IDPs respondents indicating that the Taliban had approached them for recruitment (one third out of 20).²⁶³⁷ Over 2019, UNAMA documented one case of child recruitment by the Taliban in Nangarhar.²⁶³⁸

In March 2019, the Afghan Ministry of Interior reported the arrest of a commander of the Haqqani Network, who purportedly headed a group of 40 fighters in Nangarhar.²⁶³⁹

As listed by AAN in a 2016 report, other Afghan militant groups operating in the province were then: the Tora Bora Jihadi Front, mostly active in Khogyani, Sherzad and Pachieragam, which was integrated into the mainstream Taliban movement in October 2015; Hezb-e Islami, mainly operating in Chaparhar, Kot and Sherzad; several Salafi groups, whose influence within the eastern provinces was significant and who were mainly operating in Chaparhar, Kot and Batikot; Fedaiy Karwan, a semi-autonomous group within the Taliban movement, mostly operating in Khogiani and Sherzad districts; and the Siahpushan (plural, ‘black-clad and masked’), whose alliance was not clear and who were active in Khogyani, Pachieragam and Sherzad.²⁶⁴⁰

In May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Nangarhar as one of the twelve provinces where Al Qaeda was ‘covertly active’.²⁶⁴¹ UNAMA added that its main tasks consist in ‘training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring’.²⁶⁴² The Diplomat observed that in April 2020, Al Qaeda claimed to have supported the Taliban in their fight against ISKP in Nangarhar in late 2019.²⁶⁴³

²⁶²⁹ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangrahar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁶³⁰ AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁶³¹ Diplomat (The), The Islamic State Remains Alive in Afghanistan, 27 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁶³² UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9, 27

²⁶³³ Sweden Lifos, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (version 2.0.), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 41

²⁶³⁴ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangrahar, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁶³⁵ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 15

²⁶³⁶ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 16-17

²⁶³⁷ USIP, Displacement and the Vulnerability to Mobilize for Violence: Evidence from Afghanistan, 8 January 2020, [url](#), p. 20

²⁶³⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 24

²⁶³⁹ Khaama Press, Prominent Haqqani Network commander arrested in Jalalabad city, 7 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁴⁰ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#)

²⁶⁴¹ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 12

²⁶⁴² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 85-86

²⁶⁴³ Diplomat (The), The Taliban and al-Qaeda: Enduring Partnership or Liability?, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

As of May 2020, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jaish-e Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) were listed among the foreign groups mostly present in eastern Afghanistan, notably in Nangarhar, under the leadership of the Afghan Taliban. TTP's forces were then estimated at 180 fighters situated in Lalpur district, while JeM and LeT respectively numbered 200 and 800 fighters, 'colocated with Taliban forces' in Muhmand Dara, Durbaba and Sherzad districts. These groups reportedly 'act as advisers, trainers and specialists in IEDs', while 'carrying out targeted assassinations against government officials and others'.²⁶⁴⁴ In April 2020, the Afghan security forces claimed to have destroyed JeM bases in Nangarhar and added that the group had been active over the past fifteen years in the Ghoraki area of Muhmand Dara district, along the border.²⁶⁴⁵ Other foreign groups primarily active in Nangarhar include two split factions of Pakistani Jamaat ul-Ahrar (which is itself a splinter group of TTP).²⁶⁴⁶ One of them, Hizbul Ahrar, was attacked by ANDSF in February 2020.²⁶⁴⁷ In 2016, AAN reported the presence of Lashkar-e Islam (cooperating with ISKP); the Salafi-oriented group Amr bil ma'ruf Wa Nahi An Al-Munkar; and Ansar ul-Islam, a Pakistani pro-government group. All of them were said to operate in Nazyan and Achin districts.²⁶⁴⁸

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Nangarhar province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.²⁶⁴⁹ In 2017, Nangarhar reportedly numbered 18 ALP units – more than any other province –, although in 2019, AAN could not verify that all of them were actually active.²⁶⁵⁰ In a 2020 report, AAN also noted the presence of eight newly established ANA-TF units, along with NDS-backed 'uprising forces', in ten districts of Nangarhar (among which Nazyan, Khogyani, Sherzad, Pachieragam and Achin²⁶⁵¹), where 'they appeared to be much more visible and active than the ALP'.²⁶⁵² In June 2020, the US Department of Defence stressed the 'most notable contribution' of the ANA-TF to the anti-ISKP campaign in the south of Nangarhar, where it has been tasked to keep the liberated districts secure.²⁶⁵³ Besides, the 02 unit of NDS Special Forces ('NDS-02') is said to operate in Nangarhar and to conduct counter-terrorism operations under the supervision of the CIA. It has been accused of killing civilians in several raids across the province.²⁶⁵⁴ Finally, in June 2019, the New York Times reported that the US Special Forces held several outposts in Nangarhar.²⁶⁵⁵

On their previous attempts to dislodge ISKP, ANDSF had not been able to keep the liberated areas under their control.²⁶⁵⁶ However, AAN's Obaid Ali noted that, after their respective operations against ISKP in late 2019, both the Taliban and the Afghan government had expanded their control in Nangarhar – the former in the 'remote, mountainous parts where ISKP had most of its remaining bases', the latter in lower-altitude areas. According to Ali, as of March 2020, the government controlled almost entirely 10 out of Nangarhar's 22 districts (Achin, Batikot, Behsud, Dara-i Nur, Durbaba, Kama, Kot, Muhmand

²⁶⁴⁴ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 20

²⁶⁴⁵ Tolonews, Militant Group Jaish-e-Mohammad's Bases Destroyed: ANA, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁴⁶ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#); UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 18; See also: EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report, Pakistan, Security Situation, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 26-27

²⁶⁴⁷ BBC News, Crackdown on militants as US and Afghan Taliban seek deal, 15 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁴⁸ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](#)

²⁶⁴⁹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

²⁶⁵⁰ Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN & Global Public Policy Institute, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 37, 89

²⁶⁵¹ Le Monde, A Nangarhar, au sein d'une milice coincée entre l'EI et les talibans [In Nangarhar, inside a militia wedged between IS and the Taliban], 27 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁵² Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN & Global Public Policy Institute, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 40, 75

²⁶⁵³ USDOD, Enhancing Security & Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 60

²⁶⁵⁴ HRW, "They've Shot Many Like This" Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁵⁵ NYT, U.S. Special Forces Battle Against ISIS Turns to Containment, and Concern, 14 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁵⁶ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 17

Dara, Pachieragam and Shinwar) and ruled about 70-80 % of 8 other districts (Chaparhar, Dehbala, Goshta, Kuzkunar, Lalpur, Nazyan, Rodat and Spinghar). The remaining districts were said to be under the Taliban or Pakistani AGE's control, with the Taliban being the dominant force in Hesarak, Khogyani, Sherzad and Surkhrod, where ANDSF were only present in the district centres and their surroundings.²⁶⁵⁷ Indeed, according to Tolonews information quoted by AAN, as of 2019, the civilian administration of Sherzad and Hesarak had to operate from Jalalabad.²⁶⁵⁸

According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, the Taliban shut down health clinics in Hesarak, Khogyani, Lalpur, Sherzad and Surkhrod in January 2020, indicating that they control these districts. LWJ also relied on undated Resolute Support information to assess Achin, Batikot, Chaparhar, Dehbala, Nazyan, Pachieragam and Rodat as contested. The remaining districts are presented as undetermined or government-controlled.²⁶⁵⁹

2.23.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.23.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 1 070 civilian casualties (356 deaths and 714 injured) in Nangarhar. Although this represents a decrease of 41 % compared to 2018, the province ranked second only to Kabul in this regard. UNAMA explained this 'significant decrease' by a drop in ground engagements initiated by ISKP in Nangarhar over 2019, even though the number of incidents attributed to ISKP (such as IED discoveries, detonations and armed clashes) has been increasing. In 2019, leading causes of casualties were non-suicide IEDs, followed by ground engagements and suicide IEDs.²⁶⁶⁰ In its midyear report, UNAMA provided civilian casualties numbers for the five most affected provinces between 1 January and 30 June 2020, Nangarhar ranking third with 281 casualties.²⁶⁶¹ As for Resolute Support, it recorded between 101 and 125 civilian casualties in Nangarhar in the first quarter of 2020. In the second quarter of 2020, RS indicated Nangarhar as the province that experienced the highest number of civilian casualties countrywide, with 259 civilian casualties recorded. This represents a 236 % increase compared to the previous quarter.²⁶⁶²

Regarding the severity of the conflict, Nangarhar was listed as one of the most active areas of conflict by the UN Secretary General in September 2019 and March 2020 reports.²⁶⁶³ Resolute Support recorded between 501 and 1 000 enemy-initiated attacks in Nangarhar province over the full year 2019, in line with 2018.²⁶⁶⁴ While both the Afghan government and the Taliban have taken credit for having ousted ISKP from Nangarhar in late 2019, UNAMA indicated that 'from available evidence, the record of the Taliban in pressuring ISIL-KP is mixed and considerably less than that of operations by

²⁶⁵⁷ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangrahar, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁵⁸ Tolonews, 64 Administrative Units Partially Paralyzed In 19 Provinces, 30 June 2019, [url](#) ; Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangrahar, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁵⁹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., [url](#) However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

²⁶⁶⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 36, 69, 94

²⁶⁶¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report : 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²⁶⁶² SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69 ; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 71-72

²⁶⁶³ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 6; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/74/753-S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²⁶⁶⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 69

international military forces and Afghan national security forces.²⁶⁶⁵ The US military suspended air strikes against Taliban involved in fighting with ISKP but denied any further coordination with them.²⁶⁶⁶

In May 2020, Afghan security officials interviewed by Tolonews reported that over the previous two months, the Taliban, Al Qaeda and JeM had increased their military activities in eastern Afghanistan especially in the border areas in Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan.²⁶⁶⁷ However, according to local residents interviewed by AAN in April 2020, Surkhrod and Achin had remained calm since ISKP was driven out of the region.²⁶⁶⁸ In May and June 2020, UNOCHA described the situation as ‘volatile’, with ongoing fighting between the ANDSF and AGEs, causing civilian casualties.²⁶⁶⁹

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED collected data on 705 violent events in Nangarhar province from open sources: 387 coded as ‘battles’ (55 %), 293 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ (41 %) and 25 as ‘violence against civilians’ (4 %).²⁶⁷⁰

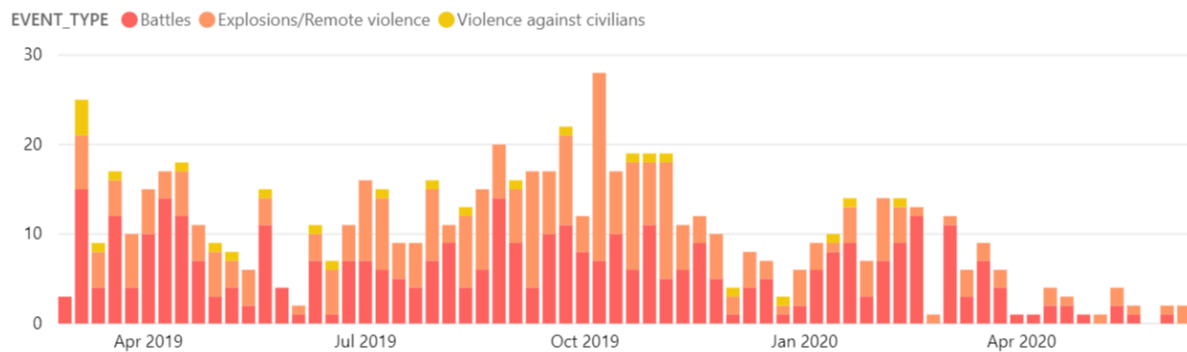


Figure 25. Nangarhar - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data²⁶⁷¹

Across these three categories, Khogyani (with the highest ‘Battles’ and ‘Explosions/remote violence’ numbers), Sherzad, Achin and Jalalabad stood as the most violence-affected districts. Between 25 and 50 incidents were recorded in Batkot, Dehbala, Muhmand Dara, Pachieragam, Shinwar and Surkhrod districts, and less than 20 in the remaining ones.²⁶⁷²

Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, an overwhelming majority of them were ‘armed clashes’, initiated in equal proportions by ANDSF and the Taliban. The highest numbers were recorded in March-April 2019, September-October 2019 and February 2020, with a very sharp drop from April 2020 until the end of the reporting period. Khogyani, Sherzad, Achin, Surkhrod (which neighbours the provincial capital, Jalalabad) and Muhmand Dara were the most affected districts by this type of

²⁶⁶⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Doubts Surround U.S. Envoy’s Claim Of Taliban Role In IS Defeat, 4 December 2019, [url](#) ; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 37

²⁶⁶⁶ USDOD, Operation Freedom’s Sentinel – Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress (January 1, 2020 – March 31, 2020), May 2020, [url](#), p. 14

²⁶⁶⁷ Tolonews, Al Qaeda, Jaish-e-Mohammad Align With Taliban in East: Officials, 12 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁶⁸ 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](#)

²⁶⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 April – 4 May 2020), 7 May 2020, [url](#) ; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (15 June – 21 June 2020), 24 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁷⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#) For more information on ACLED’s methodology, see: Introduction – Sources.

²⁶⁷¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁶⁷² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

violence.²⁶⁷³ ISKP accounted for 12 initiated armed clashes, mostly against the Taliban in Sherzad and Dehbala districts during the summer of 2019²⁶⁷⁴, as reported by media sources.²⁶⁷⁵ Overall, many armed clashes are connected to aforementioned anti-ISKP operations led by ANDSF and the Taliban.

Conversely, a maximum of five armed clashes were recorded in Behsud, Durbaba, Goshta, Kama, Kot, Kuzkunar and Rodat.²⁶⁷⁶

Also coded as an ‘armed clash’ was an attack by AGEs against the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan office in Jalalabad City in September 2019, in the run-up to the presidential election. Two civilians and two police officers were killed, and twelve others were wounded.²⁶⁷⁷

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, the most represented sub-categories were clearly ‘Air/drone strikes’ (48 %) and ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’ (43 %). Five districts accounted for 120 of the 142 strikes carried out by ANDSF and their allies against ISKP and the Taliban: Khogyani, Achin, Dehbala, Pachieragam and Sherzad. Conversely, based on ACLED data, other Nangarhar’s districts were hardly affected by this type of violence, if at all.²⁶⁷⁸ Consistently with the US airforce-backed ANDSF operations²⁶⁷⁹, half of the documented strikes took place between September and November 2019. Among such incidents, Reuters reported that on 19 September 2019, in the Wazir Tangi area of Khogyani district, a US drone fired at 150 civilians who had gathered to harvest pine nuts and were reportedly mistaken for ISKP fighters. The strike caused at least 30 deaths (of which UNAMA verified at least 20) and wounded another 40 people. UNAMA expressed concerns about ‘the measures that were taken to verify the targets’.²⁶⁸⁰

As for ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’, Jalalabad district recorded the highest numbers (34), followed by Batikot (17) and Khogyani (16).²⁶⁸¹ For instance, on 13 May 2019, the provincial capital was struck by a round of quasi simultaneous explosions (3 deaths, 20 wounded). Their perpetrators have remained unidentified.²⁶⁸² On 13 June 2019, a suicide attacker killed 5 civilians and 4 local police officers, while wounding at least 12 people, as he targeted a police vehicle in Jalalabad City.²⁶⁸³ On 19 August 2019, as people were celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the national independence, ten blasts across Jalalabad injured over 50 persons.²⁶⁸⁴ On 23 August 2019, a roadside bomb explosion killed one civilian and wounded 14 others in a bazar of Khogyani district.²⁶⁸⁵ On 7 October 2019, 11

²⁶⁷³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁶⁷⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁶⁷⁵ Khaama Press, Taliban’s Red Unit militants clash with ISIS fighters in Nangarhar province, 22 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁷⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁶⁷⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁷⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁶⁷⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Anti-Daesh operation to follow uplift projects in Achin, 7 October 2019, [url](#) ; Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangrahar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁸⁰ Reuters, U.S drone strike killed 30 pine nut farm workers in Afghanistan, 19 September 2019, [url](#) ; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](#) ; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 55-56

²⁶⁸¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁶⁸² Le Figaro, Afghanistan : explosions à Jalalabad, au moins trois morts [Explosions in Jalalabad, at least three deaths] [Source: AFP], 13 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁸³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁸⁴ RFE/RL, Dozens Wounded In Blasts As Afghanistan Marks Independence Day, 19 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁸⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

people (2 civilians) were killed and 32 injured (20 civilians) when a vehicle-borne IED hit a bus carrying ANDSF members. UNOCHA added that the attacked had been claimed by ISKP.²⁶⁸⁶

ACLED coded six other events as ‘Suicide bomb’ attacks across five districts (two in Jalalabad).²⁶⁸⁷ In October 2019, ISKP was thought to have carried out a suicide attack in a Jowdara village’s mosque, Dehbala district, during Friday prayers. It caused 119 civilian casualties (73 killed).²⁶⁸⁸ On 12 July 2019, nine people were killed, and twelve others wounded after a child was used to carry out a suicide attack during a wedding party in Pachieragam district. The attack was claimed by ISKP and reportedly targeted a pro-government militia commander.²⁶⁸⁹ On 12 May 2020, in another suicide attack carried out by ISKP during the funerals of a pro-government militia commander, 32 civilians were killed and 133 others wounded.²⁶⁹⁰

Finally, Jalalabad was the most affected district by violent events against civilians (7), followed by Khogyani (4). ACLED attributed almost half of these 25 incidents to ANDSF and their NATO allies.²⁶⁹¹ These included the killing of 13 civilians in Hesarak, in March 2019²⁶⁹² and of 8 others in Surkhrod, in February 2020, both by US air strikes.²⁶⁹³ Moreover, in September 2019, during an operation in Jalalabad, the NDS-02 Special Forces unit shot at close range four brothers from a single family suspected to be ISKP members. About 800 people gathered in Jalalabad to deny any connection between the victims and ISKP and demand justice. It eventually led to the resignation of the head of NDS.²⁶⁹⁴

Among the AGEs-attributed attacks against civilians, in December 2019, unidentified gunmen shot Dr Tetsu Nakamura, Director of Peace Japan Medical Services, and six other civilians in December 2019 in Jalalabad City. Dr Nakamura’s murder prompted public outcry, as he had been working in Afghanistan for decades and greatly improved the irrigation infrastructures in Nangarhar.²⁶⁹⁵ In the first half of 2019, a dozen of civilians, religious and tribal elders and government officials were the victims of a wave of targeted killings in Jalalabad, attributed to mafia networks by activists, or to AGEs by provincial authorities.²⁶⁹⁶ According to a Western senior analyst interviewed in 2017 by Belgium’s CEDOCA, the criminality in Jalalabad has been increasing since at least 2016.²⁶⁹⁷

In its annual report, UNAMA expressed concern over ‘Taliban attacks and actions targeting health facilities and protected personnel’.²⁶⁹⁸ By August 2019, Nangarhar was indeed one of the three provinces having witnessed the most events of direct and indirect violence against humanitarian personnel or facilities.²⁶⁹⁹ The World Health Organization reported that three health care workers were killed and four were injured in Nangarhar between January and November 2019, but recorded no

²⁶⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 October – 13 October 2019), 16 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁸⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁶⁸⁸ NYT, Afghan Village of 70 Families Faces Ruin With Mosque Massacre, 19 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 47

²⁶⁸⁹ BBC News, Afghanistan war: child used in suicide attack, 12 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁹⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report : May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁶⁹² NYT, 13 Civilians Reported Killed in U.S. Airstrikes in Afghanistan, 10 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁹³ RFE/RL, Eight Afghan Civilians Killed In Air Strike [Source: AFP and Reuters], 15 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 27 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁹⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 66-67

²⁶⁹⁵ NYT, ‘He Showed Us Life’: Japanese Doctor Who Brought Water to Afghans Is Killed, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Nangarharis say targeted killings continue unabated, 6 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁹⁷ Belgium, CEDOCA, COI Focus – Afghanistan - Veiligheidssituatie in Jalalabad, Behsud en Surkhrod [Security Situation in Jalalabad, Behsud and Surkhrod], 12 March 2020, [url](#), p. 16

²⁶⁹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 29

²⁶⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (August 2019), 24 September 2019, [url](#), p. 2

similar incident between January and May 2020.²⁷⁰⁰ In January 2020, it was reported that the Taliban had closed all health centres in Sherzad, Hesarak, Khogyani, Surkhrod and Lalpur districts. The group argued that it was a retaliatory measure against the closure of health centres by the authorities in their areas.²⁷⁰¹ Fifteen health centres were reopened a month later in Khogyani, Surkhrod, Lalpur, Muhmand Dara and Achin districts, but several others remained closed.²⁷⁰² In August 2019, during an immunisation campaign in eastern Afghanistan, access to AGE-controlled areas proved to be ‘a key challenge’ in Nangarhar, among other provinces.²⁷⁰³ UNAMA also documented a case of ANDSF members threatening the medical personnel of the Khogyani public hospital in April 2020.²⁷⁰⁴ UNAMA mentioned educational facilities impacted by the conflict as well: in July 2019, during a search operation, the NDS-02 strike force destroyed a high school in Sherzad district, depriving over 1 300 students of education.²⁷⁰⁵

2.23.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 38 640 persons displaced from Nangarhar – the fourth highest provincial numbers recorded over the period. Except for a couple of hundreds IDPs who were headed to Kabul, Khost and Laghman provinces, all of them found refuge within the province.²⁷⁰⁶ Overall, the main districts of origin of IDPs were Sherzad (20 623) and Surkhrod (9 856), distantly followed by Muhmand Dara (3 556) and Khogyani (3 271). The four of them accounted for 97 % of Nangarhar’s IDPs.²⁷⁰⁷ Massive waves of displacements in Khogyani and Sherzad districts are linked to ongoing fighting during March-April 2019 (between the Taliban and ISKP)²⁷⁰⁸, in May-June 2019²⁷⁰⁹, and in early 2020 (between ANDSF and AGEs).²⁷¹⁰ Conflict forced over 6 000 people to flee within Surkhrod district in August 2019²⁷¹¹, and displaced several other thousands of people in Muhmand Dara in early January 2020.²⁷¹² UNOCHA also reported a peak of displacements in November 2019 from Achin to Jalalabad (844)²⁷¹³, coinciding with the military operations against ISKP that took place in the district.²⁷¹⁴ Other noted factors of displacement were threats, intimidation and shelling.²⁷¹⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 48 339 persons displaced to Nangarhar province. Most of them went to Surkhrod (16 801), Jalalabad (8 316), Khogyani (7 035) and Behsud (6 700) districts. Outside of the aforementioned 38 000 people displaced within Nangarhar, 10 155 came from Kunar and mainly settled in Nangarhar’s neighbouring districts, such as Behsud, Dara-i Nur and Kuzkunar.²⁷¹⁶

²⁷⁰⁰ World Health Organization, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of 17 November, 18 November 2019, [url](#); World Health Organization, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care (January 28, 2020 – May 23, 2020), 23 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁰¹ Tolonews, Taliban Closes Health Centers In Nangarhar Districts, 21 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁰² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (3 February – 9 February 2020), 12 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 August – 11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁰⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Special Report : Attacks on Healthcare during the COVID-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

²⁷⁰⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 28

²⁷⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁰⁸ UNOCHA, Kunar Conflict - Update (as of 3 April 2019), 4 April 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Heavy fighting flares between Taliban, Islamic State in Afghanistan, 24 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁰⁹ Tolonews, Taliban-Daesh Clashes Displace Over 13,000 Families In Nangarhar, 11 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁷¹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (3 February – 9 February 2020), 12 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁷¹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (9 September – 15 September 2019), 18 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁷¹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 January – 12 January 2020), 15 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁷¹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

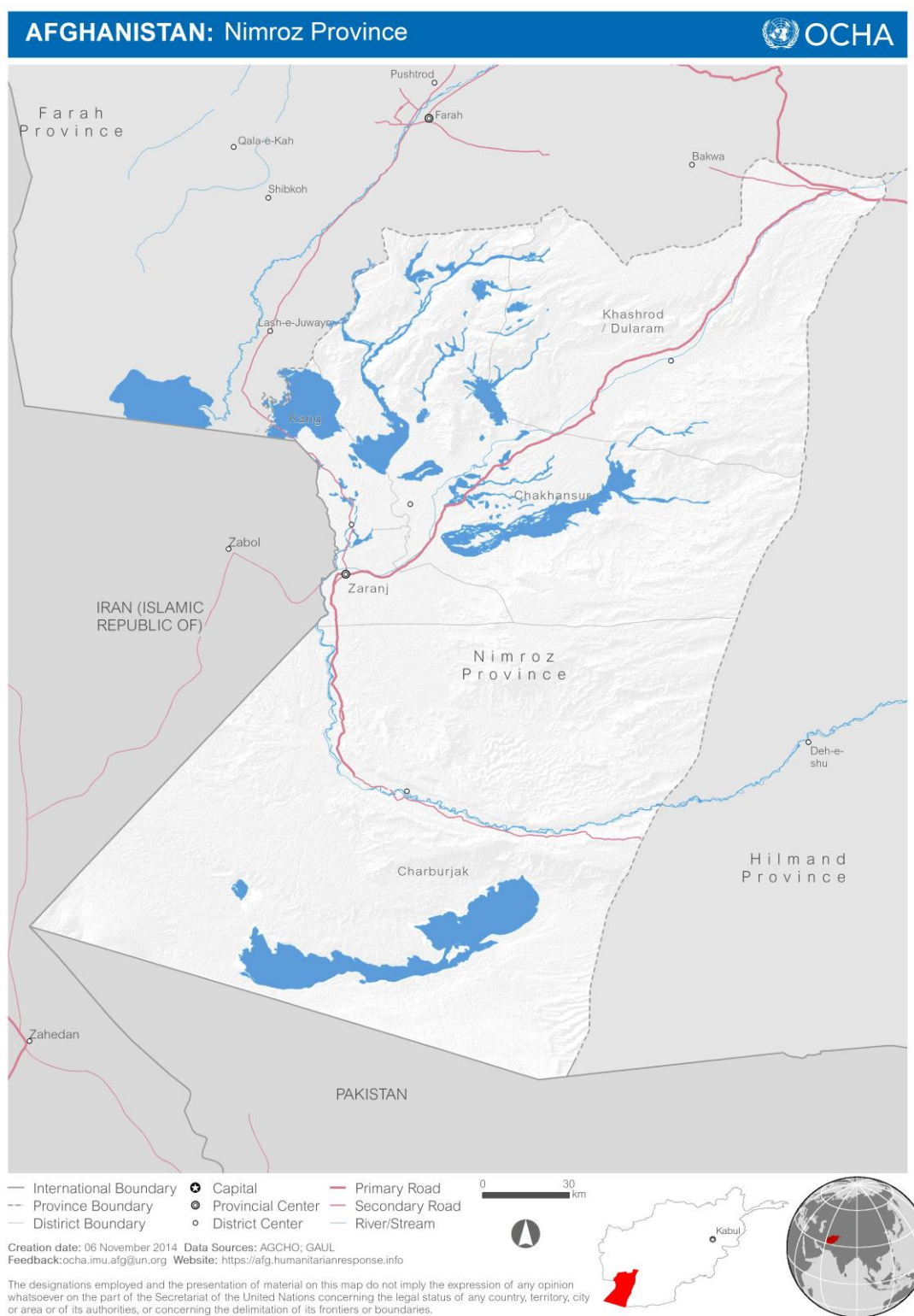
²⁷¹⁴ Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangrahar, AAN, 1 Marc 2020, [url](#)

²⁷¹⁵ UNOCHA, Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 August – 25 August 2019), 25 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁷¹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

2.24 Nimroz

2.24.1 General description of the province



Map 24: Afghanistan – Nimroz province, source: UNOCHA²⁷¹⁷

Nimroz province is located in the south-west of Afghanistan, alongside the border with Iran and Pakistan.²⁷¹⁸ The province borders Farah to the north, Helmand to the east, Pakistan to the south and Iran to the west.²⁷¹⁹ Nimroz is divided into the following districts: provincial capital Zaranj, Kang, Asle-e Chakhansur, Char Burjak, Khashrod and Dularam.²⁷²⁰

According to NSIA, the population of Nimroz is estimated at 183 554 for 2020/21. Urban population, living in provincial capital Zaranj, constitutes 16 % of all inhabitants.²⁷²¹ The population is composed mainly of Balochs, followed by Pashtuns, Tajiks²⁷²², Brahui and Uzbeks.²⁷²³ Balochs living in Afghanistan are primary nomadic.²⁷²⁴

The province's topography consists of flat and mostly desert terrain.²⁷²⁵ In 2019 Pajhwok Afghan News reported about the negative impact of 'the worst drought in living memory' in Nimroz province, as many farmers lost significant amounts of livestock²⁷²⁶ and suffered from shortages of food and high levels of malnutrition, especially among women and children.²⁷²⁷ The Afghan government started the construction of water dams on Helmand River. Kamal Khan dam in Charburjak is nearly completed and is expected to irrigate 175 000 hectares of Nimroz's farmland. It should also generate electricity which would replace the power imported from Iran. Iran was accused of sabotaging the project allegedly by supporting the local Taliban and bribing some officials in order to delay the opening of the dam. Iran reportedly is afraid that the dam would reduce its own water supplies. The construction site is currently protected by hundreds of security officers.²⁷²⁸

A national highway, starting from Delaram and intersecting Highway One, passes through the districts of Khashrod, Chakhansur and Zaranj; it leads to Zaranj City, at the Afghan-Iranian border.²⁷²⁹ The city of Zaranj hosts an airport, which was served by domestic scheduled passenger flights as of March 2019.²⁷³⁰

The province is of strategic position for smuggling because of its proximity to Iran, Pakistan and Helmand. The Zaranj – Dularam road and the south-western highways have been used as transit routes for drugs trafficking.²⁷³¹ According to Foreign Policy, Nimroz province, which was considered 'Afghanistan's drug-smuggling hub', served as a 'financial artery' for the Taliban. Zaranj City was described as 'Afghanistan's smuggling capital'.²⁷³² Moreover, Taliban militants purportedly set up checkpoints along the Zaranj-Dularam Highway and charged taxes on vehicles carrying goods.²⁷³³

In 2018, local media reported that Nimroz was also considered a key route for human trafficking and migrant smugglers. People fleeing the country are directed to Zaranj City where they usually spend a few days in very harsh conditions with little food or other basic facilities, waiting for the possibility to

²⁷¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁷¹⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷¹⁹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷²⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, [url](#), p. 44

²⁷²¹ Afghanistan NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021 [url](#), p. 44

²⁷²² Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷²³ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷²⁴ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷²⁵ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷²⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Nimroz farmers in despair as drought kills livestock, 2 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁷²⁷ Relief International, Saving Lives and Securing Futures in Drought-Stricken Afghanistan, 26 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁷²⁸ Los Angeles Times, God, gas and heroin. Now, the fight's over water, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁷²⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁷³⁰ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

²⁷³¹ IWPR, Drugs Trade Thrives in Afghan Province, 19 February 2018, [url](#)

²⁷³² Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, [url](#)

²⁷³³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban running 'customs check-point' on Nimroz road, 20 January 2018, [url](#)

cross the border to Iran, and further to Europe. People who illegally cross were deported from Iran on a daily basis through the border crossing in Nimroz.²⁷³⁴

The province was facing a significant drug problem due to a growing local rate of addiction. The high addiction rate was attributed to the large numbers of returnees from Iran, who started using drugs while working there.²⁷³⁵ It is reported that drug addiction also affects increasingly women.²⁷³⁶

According to UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Nimroz province decreased by 38 % in 2019, compared to 2018.²⁷³⁷ All villages in Nimroz producing poppy are paying taxes to Taliban or other anti-governmental elements.²⁷³⁸

Since 25 March 2020, a lockdown has been introduced in Nimroz due to an increase of COVID-19 cases, mostly imported from neighbouring Iran.²⁷³⁹ A curfew has been imposed and the border crossing point has been closed. Food import from Iran has been stopped.²⁷⁴⁰

2.24.2 Conflict background and actors in Nimroz

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Nimroz province is under the responsibility of the 215th ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southwest (TF Southwest), led by US forces.²⁷⁴¹

Certain districts of the province remain an area of substantial Taliban activity. According to Taliban sources, their troops have been present along natural and administrative boundaries and infrastructure over past two years.²⁷⁴² According to the Long War Journal, most areas in the province are controlled by Taliban, apart from the district centres and the province capital, Zaranj which are under governmental control.²⁷⁴³ According to sources quoted by Le Figaro, in 2018 Iran supported the Taliban financially, militarily and also by providing them with training units organised by the Quds Force, a branch of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. In return, Taliban fighters had to intensify their operations against ISKP and US troops.²⁷⁴⁴

Taliban fighters loyal to Mullah Rasul, the leader of a Taliban splinter group active in western Afghanistan, have been operating in Nimroz province; they were reported to fight against the main Taliban faction for control of drug-trafficking route.²⁷⁴⁵

2.24.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.24.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 62 civilian casualties (30 deaths and 32 injured) in Nimroz province. This represents a decrease of 24 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were air strikes, followed

²⁷³⁴ Tolonews, Nimroz Identified As Key Human Trafficking Route, 13 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁷³⁵ IWPR, Drugs Trade Thrives in Afghan Province, 19 February 2018, [url](#); BD News, More Afghan women find solace in drugs as coronavirus, migration upends life, 03 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁷³⁶ BD News, More Afghan women find solace in drugs as coronavirus, migration upends life, 03 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁷³⁷ Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁷³⁸ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018 – socio-economic report, July 2019, [url](#), p. 63-64

²⁷³⁹ Anadolu Agency, COVID-19: Afghanistan lockdowns frontline provinces, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁴⁰ The National, Afghanistan's doctors brace for impact as first positive coronavirus case detected, 25 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁴¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

²⁷⁴² ACLED, The World According to the Taliban: New Data on Afghanistan, 19 December 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁴³ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

²⁷⁴⁴ Le Figaro, En Afghanistan, l'Iran accroît son aide aux talibans, 19 September 2018, [url](#), p. 31

²⁷⁴⁵ RFE/RL, Taliban Infighting Leaves Dozens Of Militants Dead In Afghanistan, 30 November 2018, [url](#)

by ground engagements and explosive remnants of war.²⁷⁴⁶ Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Nimroz during both the first and second quarters of 2020.²⁷⁴⁷

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported a total 142 incidents related to security in Nimroz province, of which 109 were coded as battles, 30 as remote violence, 3 as violence against civilians.²⁷⁴⁸

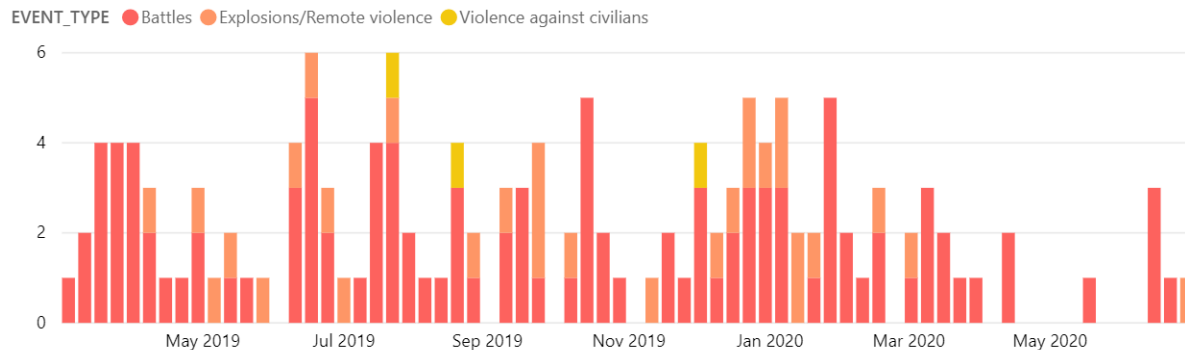


Figure 26. Nimroz - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data²⁷⁴⁹

During the reported period, US forces in Afghanistan tried to hit drug labs and other infrastructure belonging to Taliban in the province. The campaign was called Operation Iron Tempest. In 2019, US forces carried out some 200 strikes against heroin labs.²⁷⁵⁰

In March 2019, NDS forces stormed and destroyed a hideout, prison, and drug lab of Taliban in Delaram and Khashrod districts. Drugs and weapons and military equipment were confiscated.²⁷⁵¹ On 5 May 2019, US forces hit more than 60 alleged drug production sites in Farah province and neighbouring Nimroz province.²⁷⁵² According to UN investigation, at least 39 civilians were killed, among them 14 children and one woman. The multiple air strikes took place in the Bakwa district of Farah province and in the Delaram district of Nimroz province. Reports of at least 37 additional civilian casualties were not confirmed but UN tried to verify them.²⁷⁵³ The US denied the civilian casualties, claiming that USFOR-A had targeted the 'Taliban-run methamphetamine labs' which helped to fund the militant activities of AGEs. However, according to the UN, 'drug labs and associated workers cannot lawfully be designated as targets because the personnel working inside the drug production facilities were not performing combat functions.'²⁷⁵⁴ UNAMA and OHCHR established through independent investigation that 'both the sites and individuals targeted in the USFOR-A air strikes on 5 May 2019 in Bakwa district of Farah province and Delaram district of Nimroz province were civilian and, as such, should have been protected from attack.'²⁷⁵⁵

²⁷⁴⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

²⁷⁴⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

²⁷⁴⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

²⁷⁴⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

²⁷⁵⁰ BBC, US meth lab strikes in Afghanistan killed at least 30 civilians, says UN, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁵¹ SATP, Nimroz: Timeline – March 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁵² BBC, US meth lab strikes in Afghanistan killed at least 30 civilians, says UN, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁵³ UNHR, UN Report find alleged drug facilities were not lawful targets - airstrikes caused significant civilian casualties, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁵⁴ BBC, US meth lab strikes in Afghanistan killed at least 30 civilians, says UN, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁵⁵ UNAMA, Special Report on Airstrikes on Alleged Drug-Processing Facilities, October 2019, [url](#), p. 15

According to ACLED data, three civilians were killed in Kashrod district by NATO and Afghan military forces on 22 August and 8 December 2019.²⁷⁵⁶

Two civilians died in a mine explosion allegedly planted by the Taliban in Khashrod district on 4 January 2020. The bomb exploded when victims were travelling the road from Shahrak district to Khashrod district.²⁷⁵⁷

On 22 July 2019, a prosecutor was killed by unknown militants in Zaranj City and on 25 September 2019, deputy police chief of Kang district was killed by a Taliban-planted bomb.²⁷⁵⁸

There were also reports on clashes between Afghan forces and Taliban, mainly in Kashrod and Delaram districts during the year, usually not causing any civilian victims. The Taliban often attacked military and police checkpoints in the province.²⁷⁵⁹ On 19 January 2020, five Taliban insurgents were killed by NATO drone raids in Khashrod.²⁷⁶⁰ On 17 February 2020 Taliban spokesman insisted that an Afghan military helicopter had been shot down in Nimroz province. However, Afghan government claimed that the helicopter was not attacked and had made an emergency landing.²⁷⁶¹ On 15 and 18 April 2020 Taliban conducted two attacks: on security outposts in Khashrod and on armoured personnel carrier next to market place in Delaram, killing two soldiers.²⁷⁶² Local officials claimed that in Khashrod seven Taliban fighters were also killed.²⁷⁶³

2.24.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 2 557 persons displaced within Nimroz province. All of them were displaced within Zaranj City in 2019. Additionally, 597 persons were displaced to Nimroz's provincial capital, Zaranj from Farah province.²⁷⁶⁴ Displacement in the province in the reporting period was induced by conflict and droughts.²⁷⁶⁵

²⁷⁵⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

²⁷⁵⁷ SATP, Nimroz: Timeline – 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁵⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

²⁷⁵⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

²⁷⁶⁰ SATP, Nimroz: Timeline – 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁶¹ The Medialine, Taliban Attacks Continue Despite Truce Reports, 17 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁶² Voice of Jihad, 2 killed as APC destroyed in Nimroz, 16 April 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

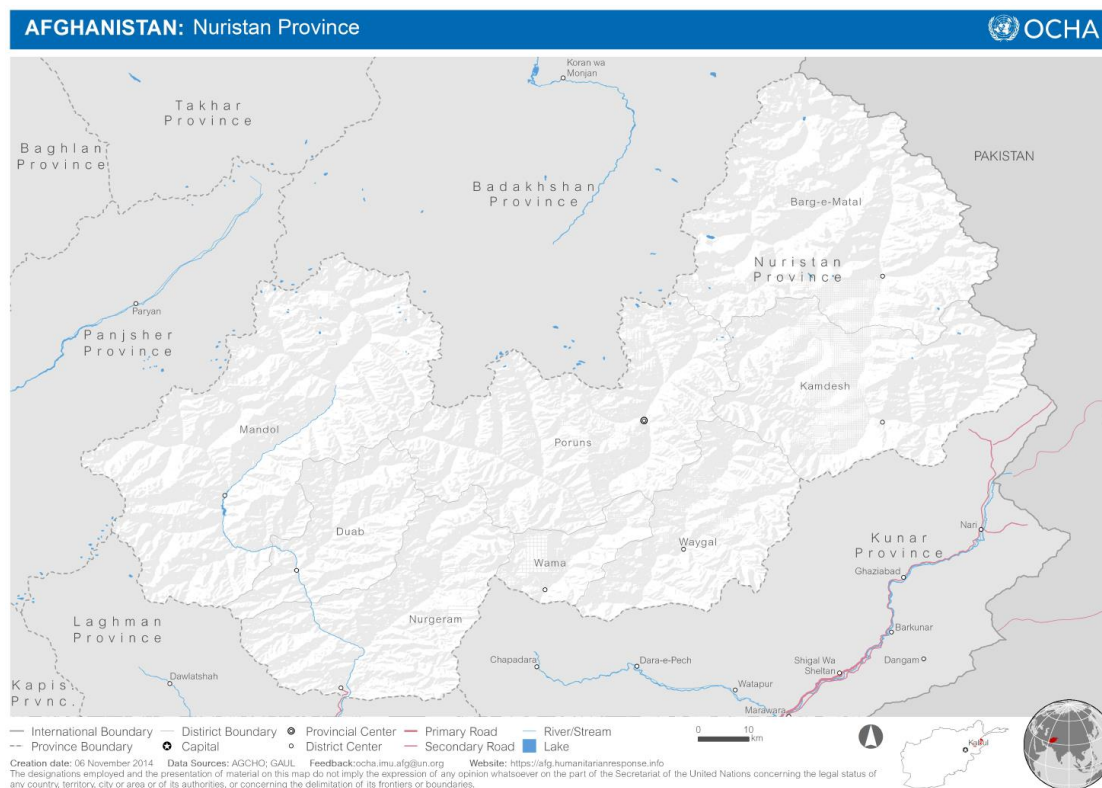
²⁷⁶³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 28 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁶⁵ Relief International, Saving Lives and Securing Futures in Drought-Stricken Afghanistan, 26 August 2019, [url](#)

2.25 Nuristan

2.25.1 General description of the province



Map 25: Afghanistan – Nuristan province, source: UNOCHA²⁷⁶⁶

Nuristan is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghan-Pakistani border. It borders Badakhshan to the north, Pakistan to the east, Kunar and Laghman to the south and Panjshir to the west.²⁷⁶⁷ RFE/RL's Gandhara noted that it was 'more closely joined' with its southern neighbours.²⁷⁶⁸ The provincial capital of Nuristan is Parun. The province is divided into the following administrative units: Barg-e-Matal, Duab, Kamdesh, Mandol, Nurgeram, Parun, Wama and Waygal.²⁷⁶⁹ According to local residents interviewed by the magazine *The Diplomat*, Waygal district's actual name is Want.²⁷⁷⁰

Nuristan is mostly mountainous and one of 'the most remote, under-served and unknown provinces' of Afghanistan. It is divided into three isolated valleys: the Alingar River valley in the west, the Pech River valley in the centre and the Landay Sin River valley in the east. Because its inhabitants were non-Muslim, the province was called Kafiristan ('Land of the infidels') until the mid-1890s, when its population converted to Islam and it was renamed Nuristan ('Land of light').²⁷⁷¹

²⁷⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nuristan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁷⁶⁷ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nuristan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷⁶⁸ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Province Looks To Islamic Schools To Prevent Youth From Joining Militants, 8 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁶⁹ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Nuristan, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 25; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nuristan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Nuristan, n. d., [url](#); Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁷⁷⁰ *Diplomat* (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: 'This War Will Never End Here', 13 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁷¹ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

According to the NSIA, the population of Nuristan is estimated at 163 814 for 2020/21.²⁷⁷² It is composed mainly of Nuristani, with smaller Pashai, Pashtuns, Gujars, Tajiks, Pashtuns²⁷⁷³ and Pashai communities.²⁷⁷⁴ Although the Nuristani people are mostly considered as a single ethnic group, de facto they comprise numerous ethnic and sub-ethnic communities that speak different Indo-European languages, sometimes subsumed under the Dardic languages branch.²⁷⁷⁵ Before the communist regime, religious leaders were respected and influenced politics. However, in areas of the province such as the Landay Sin valley, power was shared through community democracy, with a body of elders and a body of policemen appointed annually in order to define policies and enforce community law.²⁷⁷⁶ An international NGO interviewed by LIFOS stated that it was difficult for outsiders – both militants and civilians – to settle in Nuristan.²⁷⁷⁷

Most of the province's roads are only served by pack animals and, despite construction work in several districts during the early 2000s, remain in poor conditions to this day.²⁷⁷⁸ Some of them may be completely inaccessible in winter due to floods or snowfalls.²⁷⁷⁹ Even so, Nuristan became a key supply route from Pakistan for mujahideen groups in the past and remains so for the numerous insurgents active in the area today. Moreover, it connects Kabul and the Panjshir valley in the central region through the provinces of Kapisa and Laghman. Given its strategic position, road building projects were already carried out during mujahideen-times and continued by the international coalition and the Afghan government after 2001 to fight the insurgency.²⁷⁸⁰

Shortly after the NATO coalition withdrew from Kunar's Dara-i Pech area, in 2014, local tribal leaders managed to reopen the road connecting Asadabad, Kunar's capital, to Nuristan.²⁷⁸¹

Although the Diplomat described Nuristan as 'mostly neglected' by the Afghan government since 2001²⁷⁸², several rehabilitation and expansion works have been launched on the local road network in 2019. Among them, the rehabilitation of 15 kilometres of the Parun-Kunar road started in May²⁷⁸³ and, according to a former executive of the National Security Council, was still underway in November 2019.²⁷⁸⁴ In June, the local authorities began to expand a paved road from Parun to the remote districts of Kamdesh and Barg-e-Matal.²⁷⁸⁵

There is no functioning airstrip in Nuristan.²⁷⁸⁶ According to the most recent UNODC Opium Survey (2018), Nuristan has maintained poppy-free status since 2013, with the exception of 2017, when 121 hectares were cultivated.²⁷⁸⁷ A 2017 report by the German think tank Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) mentioned the involvement of various AGES in the illegal exploitation of mineral resources, such as precious stones, and in the taxation of timber, in both Kunar and Nuristan provinces.²⁷⁸⁸

²⁷⁷² Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²⁷⁷³ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nuristan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷⁷⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Nuristan, n.d., [url](#)

²⁷⁷⁵ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁷⁷⁶ MEI, Social Change in Eastern Nuristan, 23 December 2012, [url](#)

²⁷⁷⁷ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (version 2.0), 07/04/2020, [url](#), p. 42

²⁷⁷⁸ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁷⁷⁹ DLCA, Afghanistan Road Network, 4 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁷⁸⁰ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#); Foschini, F., New Battles and Old Wants in Nuristan, AAN, 2 June 2012, [url](#)

²⁷⁸¹ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Peace Returns To Afghanistan's 'Valley Of Death', 22 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁸² Diplomat (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: 'This War Will Never End Here', 13 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁸³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Rehabilitation work on Nuristan-Kunar road kicks off, 20 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁸⁴ Ghorzang, T. [Twitter], posted on : 25 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁸⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Road connecting 2 districts with Paroon being built, 24 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020 (December 2019), 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 11

²⁷⁸⁷ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN , Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 23

²⁷⁸⁸ Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, BICC, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 38 ; 42

2.25.2 Conflict background and actors in Nuristan

Conservative religious groups, such as Wahabis and Salafis, have been active in the province for decades. The Islamic clergy started to mobilize in the province after 1978, when the pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) failed to establish its rule. In this regard, the Daulat-e Inqilabiye Islam-ye Nuristan (Islamic Revolutionary State of Nuristan) emerged in northern Nuristan under the leadership of the religious scholar Mawlawi Muhammad Afzal, who also supported the Taliban movement and was therefore given the freedom to rule over the province. The escalation of hostilities with Hezb-e Islami and Jamiat-e Islami in 1997 forced him to flee the province, where the Hezb-e Islami eventually became more influential.²⁷⁸⁹ After 2001, various counter-insurgency operations were carried out throughout the province by the US military and coalition forces, until the US withdrew their troops in 2009, following some defeats. Subsequently, the Taliban expanded their control over large areas of the province. By 2018, governmental presence had often been defined as 'token' in a mountainous and remote province where villages are isolated from each other, as well as from the district centres. The community elders still play an important role, as they are said to take most of the decisions.²⁷⁹⁰

As of May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mawlawi Esmatullah, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the Taliban shadow governor in Nuristan. He was appointed after the 'reshuffle' of the Taliban government structure during the 2019-2020 winter, ahead of the 2020 fighting season.²⁷⁹¹ Quoting an AGE source, the Diplomat observed that the Nuristani Taliban had 'an Al Qaeda mindset', meaning that they shared more extreme positions regarding jihad than the bulk of the Islamic Emirate fighters. The Diplomat also reported that almost all of Taliban fighters operating in Waygal were locals. Poverty, lack of job opportunities or personal reasons (such as hostility towards someone linked to the government) were presented as the main motivations of locals joining the insurgency. Nonetheless, the magazine expressed some doubts about the actual number of Taliban fighters in the district, deeming the 1 000 – 1 500 estimates exaggerated.²⁷⁹²

In June 2020, AAN's expert Obaid Ali stated that ISKP was 'likely present' in parts of Nuristan province.²⁷⁹³ It has reportedly been the case since 2016, when many of its fighters (including foreigners²⁷⁹⁴) came to the province, pushed out of neighbouring Nangarhar.²⁷⁹⁵ According to the BICC report, ISKP first established in Waygal and Barg-e-Matal districts in late 2015 or early 2016.²⁷⁹⁶ In June 2017, a governmental source quoted by AAN reported ISKP presence in the districts of Mandol, Duab, Nurgeram, Waygal and Wama.²⁷⁹⁷ The US Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) stated that ISKP launched attacks in Nuristan in 2017, but endured significant losses in this province the following year²⁷⁹⁸,

²⁷⁸⁹ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#); MEI, Social Change in Eastern Nuristan, 23 December 2012, [url](#)

²⁷⁹⁰ Ali, O., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁷⁹¹ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9, 27

²⁷⁹² Diplomat (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: 'This War Will Never End Here', 13 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁹³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, The Taliban, The Government, And Islamic State: Who Controls What In Afghanistan?, 1 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁷⁹⁴ VoA, Islamic State Seeks Foothold in Eastern Afghan Provinces, 7 August 2017, [url](#)

²⁷⁹⁵ Ali, O., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#); Dawn, ISKP: another emerging giant?, 16 October 2017, [url](#); LWJ, Islamic State's emir for its Khorasan province killed, 26 August 2018, [url](#); VoA, Afghans Dispute Russia's Islamic State Claims, 27 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁷⁹⁶ Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, BICC, June 2017, [url](#), p. 22

²⁷⁹⁷ Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁷⁹⁸ Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Broken but not defeated – An examination of State-led operations against Islamic State Khorasan in Afghanistan and Pakistan (2015-2018), March 2020, [url](#), pp. 51-52

notably from the Taliban.²⁷⁹⁹ However, in May 2019, Afghan reporter Bilal Sarwary noted that ISKP had made significant territorial gains in both Kunar and Nuristan provinces, thus getting access to natural and mineral resources.²⁸⁰⁰ ISKP has allegedly been dealing with the local communities in a nonviolent way and delegated the recruitment task to the Taliban commanders who defected to it. In 2017, the group was said to tax timber and precious metals or minerals smuggled to Pakistan.²⁸⁰¹ As of August 2019, ISKP was reportedly recruiting fighters in Nuristan²⁸⁰², with the support of Salafi enclaves in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan.²⁸⁰³ Some local clerics also accepted to spread ISKP's message, out of fear of reprisals.²⁸⁰⁴ In November 2019, Nuristan tribal leaders called for the creation of local madrasas, in order to prevent young people to be indoctrinated and recruited as jihadi fighters in radical Pakistani Quranic schools.²⁸⁰⁵

As of May 2020, Nuristan was listed by the UN Security Council as one of the twelve provinces where Al Qaeda was 'covertly active'. The report mentioned that Al Qaeda intended to form a joint unit of 2 000 fighters with the Haqqani Network, headed by Shir Khan Manga in the operational zone composed of Kunar and Nuristan.²⁸⁰⁶ UNAMA added that Al Qaeda's main tasks consist in 'training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring', while 'being engaged in internal Taliban discussions over the movement's relationships with other jihadists entities'.²⁸⁰⁷ Already in 2012, Nuristan had been described as a stronghold Al Qaeda.²⁸⁰⁸ In 2018-2019, it was said to operate training camps in the province.²⁸⁰⁹

While the Taliban have denied that Al Qaeda was fighting along them²⁸¹⁰, LWJ pointed out that Qari Zia Rahman, a commander said to operate in Kunar and Nuristan provinces, as well as in several Pakistani tribal agencies, was affiliated to both movements.²⁸¹¹ In a May 2020 report, the UN Security Council listed Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jaish-e Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LeT) as Pakistani armed groups centred in eastern Afghan provinces, such as Nuristan, 'where they operate under the umbrella of the Afghan Taliban'.²⁸¹² As of 2016, along with Salafi group Jama'at al-Da'wa ila al-Quran wa-l-Sunna (JDQS), TTP reportedly controlled the Bajaur-Kunar-Nuristan corridor and used it to bring fighters and equipment into Afghanistan.²⁸¹³

In terms of presence of government security forces, Nuristan province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.²⁸¹⁴ According to a local lawmaker, the Afghan National Police and the Afghan Local Police

²⁷⁹⁹ Telegraph (The), Taliban claim to be preparing onslaught to drive Islamic State from Afghan stronghold, 7 August 2018, [url](#); National (The), Taliban prepare 'decisive' anti-ISIS operation in eastern Afghanistan, 5 August 2018, [url](#); Difesa & Sicurezza, Afghanistan, i talebani si preparano a cacciare Isis da Nangarhar, 8 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁰⁰ Sarwary, B. [Twitter], posted on : 3 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁰¹ Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, BICC, June 2017, [url](#), p. 42

²⁸⁰² Ariana News, *افزایش نگرانی ها از عسکرگیری داعشیان در نورستان* [unofficial translation: Rising concerns on the recruitment of fighters by Daesh in Nooristan], 24 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁰³ taz, „Islamischer Staat“ und Taliban : Der afghanische Terrorwettbewerb [„Islamic State“ and Taliban: the Afghan terror competition], 1 February 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁰⁴ Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, BICC, June 2017, [url](#), p. 22

²⁸⁰⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Province Looks To Islamic Schools To Prevent Youth From Joining Militants, 8 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁰⁶ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 12-13

²⁸⁰⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 85-86

²⁸⁰⁸ LWJ, Bin Laden advised relocation of some leaders to Afghanistan due to drone strikes in Waziristan, 3 May 2012, [url](#)

²⁸⁰⁹ Khaama Press, Taliban militants killed in U.S. drone strike in Nuristan province, 24 October 2018, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban promotes training camp for 'Commando Mujahidin', 22 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁸¹⁰ Tolonews, Al Qaeda, Jaish-e-Mohammad Align With Taliban in East: Officials, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁸¹¹ LWJ, Female Pakistani Taliban suicide bomber hits hospital, 21 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁸¹² UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 20

²⁸¹³ Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, BICC, June 2017, [url](#), p. 38

²⁸¹⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

are in insufficient numbers in Nuristan.²⁸¹⁵ In this regard, the Diplomat reported that the ANP and ALP had 250 men combined in Waygal district and focused on preventing the Taliban to get into the district centre from the mountains.²⁸¹⁶ The NDS-04, a unit of the NDS paramilitary strike forces, operates in Nuristan, Kunar and other provinces of North-East Afghanistan. In a 2019 report, Human Rights Watch explained that, although they are technically subordinated to the NDS, these forces are trained, equipped and overseen by the CIA. They conduct brutal night raids, targeting alleged insurgents and often injuring or killing civilians. These operations have grown increasingly frequent since late 2017.²⁸¹⁷ According to AAN's Kate Clark, in 2017, the NDS-04 unit numbered 250 men trained by US Special Forces.²⁸¹⁸

An AAN report stated that, in November 2018 almost all the districts of Nuristan province were somehow under control or influence of the Taliban and that the police's presence was limited to district centres.²⁸¹⁹ In January 2020, French daily newspaper *Le Figaro* described Nuristan as 'a virtually inaccessible Taliban stronghold'²⁸²⁰, while Afghan news agency Khaama asserted that the Taliban were active in 'some districts' of the province (without specifying which ones) and 'often conduct terrorist related activities'.²⁸²¹ In a 2019 article, the Diplomat stated that outside of the district centre and its immediate surroundings, most of Waygal was under Taliban's control.²⁸²² According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, Kamdesh district is 'traditionally a hotbed of Taliban activity'. Kamdesh, Wama, Mandol (as of August 2019²⁸²³), Waygal and Duab districts are assessed as contested by the Afghan government and the Taliban. The three remaining districts, Nurgeram, Parun and Barg-e Matal, are presented as controlled by the government or undetermined.²⁸²⁴

2.25.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.25.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 22 civilian casualties (8 deaths and 14 injured) in Nuristan. This represents a decrease of 8 % compared to 2018. Only Bamyan and Panjsher provinces recorded less casualties over 2019. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, targeted/deliberate killings and non-suicide IED.²⁸²⁵ According to a SIGAR analysis of data provided by Resolute Support, from January to May 2019, relatively to its population, Nuristan was the second most dangerous province for civilians (0.17 casualties per thousand inhabitants).²⁸²⁶ At the end of the third quarter, although the ratio had increased to 0,22, Nuristan was now only in line with the national average.²⁸²⁷ Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 50 civilian casualties in Nuristan in the first half of 2020, reporting similar numbers over the two first quarters.²⁸²⁸

In regard with the severity of the conflict, over the full year 2019, Resolute Support recorded less than 150 enemy-initiated attacks in Nuristan province – one of the five lowest provincial numbers.²⁸²⁹ In

²⁸¹⁵ Tolonews, Governor Rejects Rumors On Daesh Presence In Nuristan, 23 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁸¹⁶ Diplomat (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: 'This War Will Never End Here', 13 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁸¹⁷ HRW, "They've Shot Many Like This" Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁸¹⁸ Clark, K., CIA-proxy militias, CIA-drones in Afghanistan: "Hunt and kill" déjà vu, AAN, 26 October 2017, [url](#)

²⁸¹⁹ Ali, O., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁸²⁰ *Le Figaro*, Afghanistan: à Taranak, l'alliance secrète des talibans et de l'armée contre l'État islamique [In Taranak, the Taliban and the army's secret alliance against the Islamic State], 30 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁸²¹ Khaama Press, 550 kgs of explosives discovered from a vegetables truck in Nuristan province, 11 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁸²² Diplomat (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: 'This War Will Never End Here', 13 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁸²³ LWJ, Taliban threatens Panjshir province, 4 August 2019, [url](#)

²⁸²⁴ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., [url](#) However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

²⁸²⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

²⁸²⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 71

²⁸²⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2019, [url](#), p. 75

²⁸²⁸ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69 ; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72 At the time of writing, UNAMA provincial data for 2020 was not available.

²⁸²⁹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 69

January 2020, Pajhwok ranked Nuristan and Panjshir as the two provinces least affected by the conflict over 2019, with only two attacks recorded in each one of them.²⁸³⁰ However, at the end of 2019 and in January 2020, UNOCHA reported ongoing fighting in ‘various districts’ of several eastern provinces, among which Nuristan.²⁸³¹ Afghan journalist Bilal Sarwary noted that, soon after the signature of the US-Taliban agreement in Doha (February 2020), the Taliban had resumed their attacks on Afghan security forces, notably in Nuristan’s Barg-e Matal district.²⁸³² Afghan security officials also reported increasing Taliban military activity between March and May 2020 in eastern Afghanistan, particularly in Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan.²⁸³³ UNOCHA confirmed that fighting continued in Nuristan and other eastern provinces in early May 2020, although it did not specifically mention the Taliban.²⁸³⁴

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED collected data on 52 violent events in Nuristan province from open sources: 39 coded as ‘battles’ (75 %), 11 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ (21 %) and 2 as ‘violence against civilians’ (4 %).²⁸³⁵

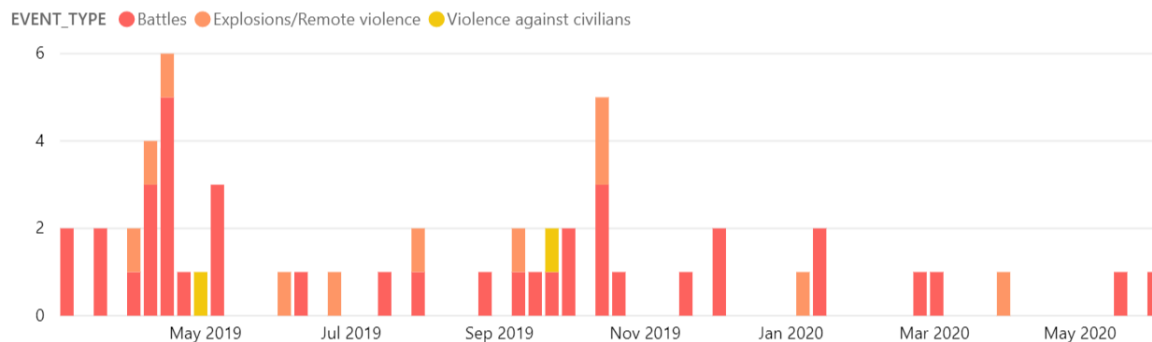


Figure 27. Nuristan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data²⁸³⁶

Across these three categories, Kamdesh (18 incidents) and Nurgeram (13) stood out as the districts where most violent incidents were reported between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, accounting for almost two thirds of the total number. Less than 10 violent events were recorded in Barg-e Matal, Duab, Wama and Waygal, and none in Mandol and Parun.²⁸³⁷

Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, all of them were ‘armed clashes’. Half of these took place in Kamdesh and Nurgeram districts. Out of 39 clashes, 25 were attributed to the Taliban and conducted against ANDSF.²⁸³⁸ Such events include a Taliban attack on the Afghan military in April 2019, in Nurgeram, resulting in the killing of 13 assailants.²⁸³⁹ In October 2019, the Taliban briefly took over

²⁸³⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 22,300 people killed, injured in Afghanistan last year, 7 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁸³¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 December – 29 December), 31 December 2019, [url](#) ; UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 December 2019 – 5 January 2020), 8 January 2020, [url](#) ; UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 January – 12 January 2020), 15 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁸³² Sarwary, B. [Twitter], posted on : 2 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁸³³ Tolonews, ANDSF Repels Scores of Taliban Attacks in Past 24 Hours: MoD, 4 May 2020, [url](#) ; Tolonews, Al Qaeda, Jaish-e-Mohammad Align With Taliban in East: Officials, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁸³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 May – 10 May 2020), 13 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁸³⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#) For more information on ACLED’s methodology, see: Introduction – Sources.

²⁸³⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁸³⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁸³⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁸³⁹ Khaama Press, 3 Taliban commanders and their 10 fighters killed in Nuristan province, 21 April 2019, [url](#)

an ALP outpost in the Pasha Gul area of Nurgeram district, killing six police officers.²⁸⁴⁰ Moreover, Taliban attacks on Waygal's district centre in April 2019²⁸⁴¹ and in April 2020²⁸⁴² were repulsed. Regarding the most recent one, Tolonews reported on Twitter that 'hundreds' of Taliban fighters had been involved.²⁸⁴³ Over the course of 2019, State news agency Bakhtar News also reported several clashes involving the border police and the Taliban or other AGEs²⁸⁴⁴, some of them being purportedly Pakistani.²⁸⁴⁵ Most of them took place in the frontier area of Kamdesh district.²⁸⁴⁶

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as 'Explosions/Remote violence', seven out of eleven were 'Remote explosive/Landmine/IED', carried out by the Taliban against ANDSF.²⁸⁴⁷

Over the reporting period, the two recorded events of violence against civilians were documented by Taliban's Voice of Jihad.²⁸⁴⁸ In one instance, Afghan forces were accused of randomly firing at civilians and injuring one in Waygal district in April 2019.²⁸⁴⁹ In April 2020, the National Security Council spokesman, quoted by Pajhwok, claimed that the Taliban had killed 30 civilians across several provinces, including Nuristan, in the previous days.²⁸⁵⁰

The conflict has significantly affected local health infrastructures. UNAMA indeed reported that between April and May 2019, the Taliban had forced 13 health clinics to close in 4 districts of Nuristan, until a mediation led by community elders secured their reopening.²⁸⁵¹ By June 2019, another dozen of clinics run by an Afghan aid organisation in Duab, Mandol, Nurgeram, Kamdesh and Barg-e Matal districts – representing a quarter of the 43 health centres operating in Nuristan – had been forced to close by the Taliban, who claimed to have received complaints about the quality of the services provided by the NGO.²⁸⁵² In November 2019, one of the three health centres closed due to insurgent threats was reopened.²⁸⁵³ Other NGO-run health centres had to close because of ongoing fighting in 2020.²⁸⁵⁴ In August 2019, a polio immunisation campaign was disrupted in some NSAG-controlled areas of Nuristan and other eastern provinces.²⁸⁵⁵

Nuristan has been one of the five most affected provinces by the closing of polling centres decided by the Afghan Ministry of Interior ahead of the presidential election of September 2019, because Afghan

²⁸⁴⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 ALP personnel killed in Nuristan [sic] attack, 17 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁴¹ Diplomat (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: 'This War Will Never End Here', 13 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁴² Afghanistan Times (The) [Twitter], posted on : 8 April 2020, [url](#); Tolonews [Twitter], posted on: 8 April 2020, [url](#); Sarwary, B. [Twitter], posted on : 8 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁴³ Tolonews [Twitter], posted on: 8 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁴⁴ Bakhtar News, Border Policemen Shelling on Taliban in Nooristan, 12 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁴⁵ Bakhtar News, Pakistan Terrorists Killed in Nooristan, 15 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁴⁶ Bakhtar News, Six Rebels Residents of Pakistan Kill [sic] in Nooristan, 16 September 2019, [url](#); Bakhtar News, Taliban Killed By Border Police Officials in Nooristan, 13 October 2019, [url](#); Bakhtar News, Taliban Militants Killed By Border Police in Nooristan, 3 December 2019, [url](#); Bakhtar News, Border PF Kill Taliban Militants in Nooristan, 16 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁴⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁸⁴⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁸⁴⁹ Voice of Jihad, *نورستان: وایت وایگل کې د دښمن توپونو ۳ کليوال ژوبل، ۳۵ څاروي ووژل* [Nuristan: 1 villager wounded, 3 animals killed by enemy artillery in Want Waigal], 29 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁵⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill 30 civilians in a week : NSC, 12 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁵¹ UNAMA, Midyear Update On The Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict: 1 January To 30 June 2019, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 5

²⁸⁵² Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban close 12 NGO-run health clinics in Nuristan, 11 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Taliban Target Aid Groups, in an Ominous Turn in Afghanistan, 13 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁵³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 November – 10 November 2019), 13 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Access Snapshot (February 2020), 29 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Access Snapshot (March 2020), 13 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (5-11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, [url](#)

security forces could not ensure their protection.²⁸⁵⁶ Twenty polling centres (about a third of the provincial total number) were supposed to be kept closed in Nuristan.²⁸⁵⁷

2.25.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 551 persons displaced from Nuristan – one of the lowest provincial figures recorded over the period. Only 39 IDPs were reported during the first half of 2020. Half of the IDPs were displaced within the province, while the other half was headed to Panjshir province.²⁸⁵⁸ Overall, the main districts of origin of IDPs were Mandol (259), Kamdesh (92) and Nurgeram (78). The three of them accounted for almost 80 % of Nuristan's IDPs.²⁸⁵⁹ The highest displacement figures were recorded during the summer of 2019. According to IDPs interviewed in September 2019 by RFE/RL's Gandhara, frequent fighting between the government forces and insurgents, but also clashes between the Taliban and ISKP, had forced them to flee. Others stated that, as government supporters, they had no other option but to leave.²⁸⁶⁰

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 1 696 persons displaced to Nuristan province. Outside of the aforementioned 292 people displaced within the province, 1 404 IDPs came from neighbouring Kunar and primarily settled in Parun and Wama districts.²⁸⁶¹ Most of them fled Kunar's Chapadara district in March and April 2019, where the Taliban and ISKP were then reportedly clashing.²⁸⁶²

Although UNAMA data does not reflect this information, in September 2019, Gandhara reported that some Nuristani civilians had taken shelter in Kunar and Nangarhar.²⁸⁶³

²⁸⁵⁶ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (10): What to watch out for on election day, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁵⁷ Tolonews, Security Report On Polling Centers Sparks Backlash, 19 September 2019, [url](#); AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (10): What to watch out for on election day, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁵⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁵⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁶⁰ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Insecurity Prompts Thousands To Flee Homes In Eastern Afghan Province, 13 September 2019, [url](#)

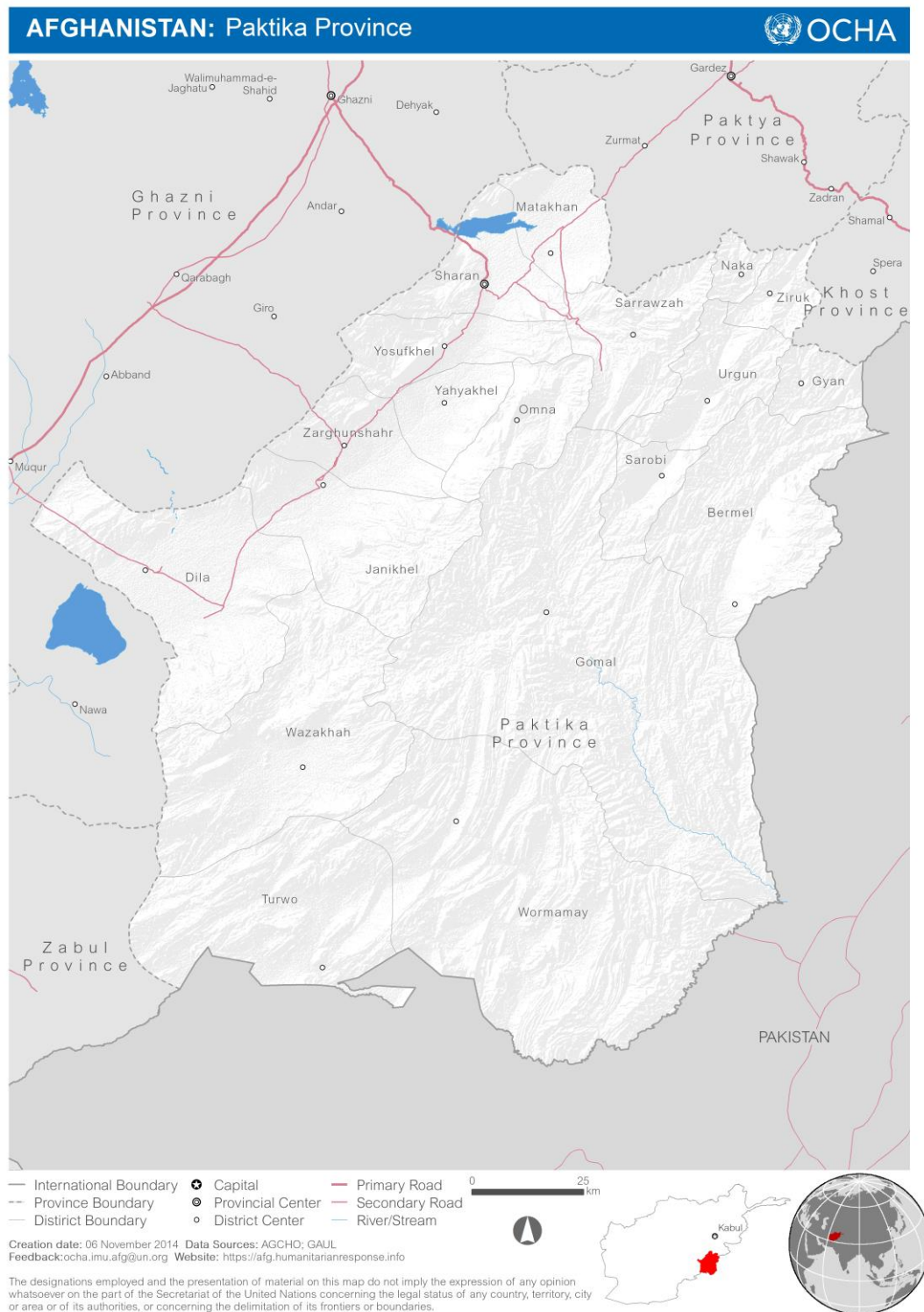
²⁸⁶¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Kunar Conflict – Update (as of 3 April 2019), 4 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁶³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, Insecurity Prompts Thousands To Flee Homes In Eastern Afghan Province, 13 September 2019, [url](#)

2.26 Paktika

2.26.1 General description of the province



Map 26: Afghanistan – Paktika province, source: UNOCHA²⁸⁶⁴

²⁸⁶⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktika Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

A part of Loya Paktya (i.e. 'Greater Paktya'), an area also encompassing the provinces of Paktya and Khost²⁸⁶⁵, Paktika is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghan-Pakistani border. It borders Ghazni to the north-west, Paktya and Khost to the north, Pakistan to the south and east and Zabul to the south-west.²⁸⁶⁶ The provincial capital of Paktika is Sharana. The province is divided into the following administrative units: Bermel, Dila (also Khushamand), Gomal, Gyan, Janikhel, Matakhan, Naka, Omna, Sarobi, Sarrawzah, Sharan, Turwo, Urgun, Wazakhah, Wormamay, Yahyakhel, Yosufkhel, Zarghunshahr (also Khaikot) and Ziruk.²⁸⁶⁷ As reported by the official website of the Office of the Afghan President, the province also has the following four non-official districts: Shakeen, Bak Khil, Charbaran and Shakhil Abad.²⁸⁶⁸

The province is composed of three sub-regions: the northern-central sub-region, the south-east sub-region along the Afghan-Pakistani border and the south-west sub-region, called Katawaz, which was previously part of Ghazni. Paktika became a separate province under President Daud's rule (1973-1978), and there is still a strong sense of belonging to one of the three sub-regions among the population.²⁸⁶⁹ Moreover, local tribal relations still play an important role in the province.²⁸⁷⁰

According to the NSIA, the population of Paktika is estimated at 775 498 for 2020/21. The rural population accounts for 99 % of the total.²⁸⁷¹ The province is composed mainly of Pashtuns, with a Tajik minority in the cities of Sharana and Urgun.²⁸⁷² RFE/RL's Gandhara also pointed out that, in 2014, military operations in North Waziristan forced 7 000 Pakistani families to seek shelter in Khost and Paktika, primarily in Urgun and Bermel districts.²⁸⁷³

The National Highway 11 ('NH11') connects Ghazni province to Paktika's Sharan and continues to Paktya's Zumat.²⁸⁷⁴ As of December 2018 the Ghazni-Paktika Highway had been closed for six months, following Taliban attacks in Ghazni province.²⁸⁷⁵ In November 2019, the Taliban were still blocking the highway and had diverted the traffic to an unpaved road through Ghazni's Andar district, although they denied to have abducted people and extorted money from drivers.²⁸⁷⁶ Furthermore, in May 2019, according to RFE/RL, the Taliban 'heavily damaged' the gravel road linking Ghazni province to Paktika's Urgun district, in an attempt to cut off villages from provincial capitals.²⁸⁷⁷ In May 2019 as well, Afghan security forces led 'route clearance operations' in unspecified Paktika districts.²⁸⁷⁸ At last, as of March 2020, the highway crossing Wazakhah district had reportedly been blocked by the Taliban for several years in Goshta area.²⁸⁷⁹

²⁸⁶⁵ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), *Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field*, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 57

²⁸⁶⁶ US, Naval Postgraduate School, *Paktika Provincial Overview*, n.d., [url](#)

²⁸⁶⁷ Afghanistan, IEC, *Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Paktika*, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, *Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021*, June 2020, [url](#), p. 21; UNOCHA, *Afghanistan: Paktika Province – District Atlas*, April 2014, [url](#) Pajhwok Afghan News, *Back ground Profile of Paktika*, n.d., [url](#); Muzhary, F., *The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling*, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁶⁸ Afghanistan, Office of the President, *Provincial Profile Paktika*, n. d., [url](#)

²⁸⁶⁹ Muzhary, F., *The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling*, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁰ Clark, K. and Muzhary, F., *How to Set up a 'Good ALP': The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful*, AAN, 11 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁷¹ Afghanistan, NSIA, *Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021*, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²⁸⁷² Muzhary, F., *The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling*, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁷³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, *In Afghanistan, Lockdown Hits Waziristan Refugees Hard*, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁴ Italy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Evaluation Report - Afghanistan: Rehabilitation of Maidan Shar – Bamyān Road*, 2014, [url](#), p. 8; Pajhwok Afghan News, *6 months on, Ghazni-Paktika highway remains closed*, 13 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, *6 months on, Ghazni-Paktika highway remains closed*, 13 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁶ Muzhary, F., *One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province*, AAN, 13 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, *18 months on, Ghazni-Paktika road remains shut*, 3 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁷ RFE/RL, *Afghan Teen Loses Her Eye Waiting To Prove Horrific Injury Was From War*, 25 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁸ Khaama Press, *8 Taliban militants killed, 24 IEDs destroyed in Balkh, Farah and Paktika provinces*, 25 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁷⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, *Police officer accused of torture, extortion*, 19 March 2020, [url](#)

There is an unofficial motorable crossing point to Pakistan in Angur Ada, Bermel district. Besides, since the full reopening of Khost's Ghulam Khan border point, in August 2019, the residents of Paktya, Paktika and Khost are allowed to get into Pakistan with their *tazkera*, under the condition that they have relatives living on the other side of the Durand Line.²⁸⁸⁰

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Paktika has maintained poppy-free status since 2014.²⁸⁸¹

2.26.2 Conflict background and actors in Paktika

In some parts of Paktika, such as Yahyakhel district²⁸⁸², solid intra-tribal relations 'hampered the emergence of mujahedin factions and strongmen and the sort of severe intra-factional conflicts that arose in other districts in Paktika and elsewhere in the 1980s and 1990s'.²⁸⁸³ However, according to an AAN analysis from December 2018, the Taliban were then predominant in many areas of Paktika province. Some districts were either fully under Taliban control or contested.²⁸⁸⁴ In July 2019, intra-Taliban clashes in Gyan district suggested potential internal dissensions.²⁸⁸⁵

As of May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mullah Nasar, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the Taliban shadow governor in Paktya, while Mawlawi Qasam Farid was listed as the head of the military commission in Loya Paktya.²⁸⁸⁶

In December 2019, Pajhwok reported that a Taliban training centre had been destroyed by the Afghan security forces in Wazakhah district.²⁸⁸⁷ Nonetheless, in April 2020, a Taliban spokesman published pictures of a training camp, named Tariq bin Ziyad Camp, in Paktika.²⁸⁸⁸ The Taliban have also been able to send fighters from Pakistan's Waziristan to several provinces, including Paktika, from their 'transit hub' in Zabul.²⁸⁸⁹

Moreover, Paktika is one of the provinces where the UN Security Council observed 'strong ties' between the Taliban and organised criminal groups involved in heroin and hashish traffics or local businesses extortion.²⁸⁹⁰

In April 2020, Long War Journal described Paktika as 'a bastion of the Haqqani Network'.²⁸⁹¹ The group started to expand in Loya Paktya some years before 2011²⁸⁹², mainly in the Zadran valley between Paktya, Paktika and Khost, which served as a corridor from Pakistan to Ghazni and Logar through the districts of Spera in Khost, Gyan in Paktika and Zurmat in Paktya.²⁸⁹³ As of June 2019, according to Afghan officials quoted in a UN Security Council report, 1 800 – 2 000 fighters of the network were

²⁸⁸⁰ Sabawoon, A. M., The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁸¹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 21

²⁸⁸² Clark, K. and Muzhary, F., How to Set up a 'Good ALP': The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, [url](#); Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁸³ Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN & Global Public Policy Institute, July 2020, [url](#), p. 51

²⁸⁸⁴ Clark, K. and Muzhary, F., How to Set up a 'Good ALP': The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, [url](#)

²⁸⁸⁵ Khaama Press, Clashes reported among Taliban militants in Paktika province, 16 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁸⁶ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 25, 27

²⁸⁸⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban killed in Paktika operations, 19 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁸⁸ LWJ, Taliban touts more elite 'Red Unit' fighter training on social media, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁸⁹ UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 21-22

²⁸⁹⁰ UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 12

²⁸⁹¹ LWJ, Taliban touts more elite 'Red Unit' fighter training on social media, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁹² Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

²⁸⁹³ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 9. See also: UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktika Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

reportedly leading the Taliban operations in Loya Paktya, with the help of militants belonging to the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan. The report added that the Haqqani Network was then holding all the main shadow government positions (provincial governors and district governors) in the region.²⁸⁹⁴ As of May 2020, the Haqqani Network was allegedly working with Al Qaeda on a joint unit of 2 000 fighters, headed by Hafiz Azizuddin Haqqani in Loya Paktya.²⁸⁹⁵

In 2019, Al Qaeda was reportedly trying to strengthen its positions in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, for instance in Paktika's Bermel district. As stated by a UN Security Council report, the movement was then closely cooperating with Lashkar-e Tayyiba and the Haqqani Network, while providing training and religious instruction to Taliban fighters and their families.²⁸⁹⁶ In May 2019, Al Qaeda released a video flaunting its involvement in an attack launched along the Taliban on an ANA convoy, purportedly in Wazakhah district.²⁸⁹⁷

Links between the Haqqani Network and foreign groups connected to Al Qaeda in eastern Afghanistan (such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihadi Union) had been reported by LWJ in 2012.²⁸⁹⁸ In a June 2019 report, the UN Security Council listed other foreign groups active in Loya Paktya, where they benefitted from the 'remote terrain' and the limited capacity of the security forces to reach these areas. Among them is the TTP, with more than an estimated 3 500 fighters spread across Kunar, Paktya and Paktika provinces.²⁸⁹⁹ In February 2020, one of TTP's leaders was killed in Kabul after travelling from Paktika. The province also appears to shelter a few logistics and religious leaders of the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, although it is mainly located in the north-eastern regions.²⁹⁰⁰

Pakistan's paramilitary forces have also been reported to make forays into Paktika, notably in Gomal district, where they set up barbed wire along the border, thus capturing parcels of Afghan territory, in November 2019.²⁹⁰¹

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Paktika province is under the responsibility of the 203th ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.²⁹⁰² As for the ALP, it has been commended for expelling the Taliban from Yahyakhel district and maintaining stability there since 2012. Although there has been reports of 'abusive commanders and forced recruitments' in some places of Paktika, the robust and 'relatively egalitarian' tribal structures of Loya Paktya and its tradition of local defence groups (arbaki) have contributed to 'more instances of effective, less abusive forces'.²⁹⁰³ According to Human Rights Watch, the Khost Protection Force (KPF) reportedly possesses a battalion in Paktika's Sharan district.²⁹⁰⁴ Another pro-government armed group, based in Paktika, emerged in 2019, and is locally referred to as 'Shaheen Forces'. Also known as 904 Unit, they are headquartered at Shaheen Camp in Urgun district. As the KPF, Shaheen Forces operate outside of official security forces chains of command, with the coalition forces' ground and air support. UNAMA added that Shaheen Forces were thought to operate in 'close coordination' with the NDS special forces and enjoyed impunity for their abuses, despite occasional investigations ordered by the government, which contributes to 'anti-Government sentiment and spark protests among the civilian

²⁸⁹⁴ UNSG, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 17

²⁸⁹⁵ UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 13

²⁸⁹⁶ UNSG, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 9

²⁸⁹⁷ LWJ, Al Qaeda video emphasizes unity with Taliban's Islamic emirate, 11 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁹⁸ LWJ, Al Mujahir Jihadi Studio' releases video of attack on base in Paktika, 7 September 2012, [url](#)

²⁸⁹⁹ UNSG, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), pp. 17-18

²⁹⁰⁰ UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 20-21

²⁹⁰¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Pakistani forces stray into Gomal district of Paktika, 8 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁰² USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

²⁹⁰³ Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN & Global Public Policy Institute, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 44, 46-47, 52-53

²⁹⁰⁴ HRW, "They've Shot Many Like This" Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

population'. Along with the KPF, the Shaheen Forces have been held responsible for the majority of civilian casualties by pro-government armed groups recorded across the country in 2019.²⁹⁰⁵ As a matter of fact, Paktika is not new to abuses committed by these groups. Referring to a HRW report and British reporter Julius Cavendish's investigation, AAN's expert Kate Clark indeed mentioned that as the head of a Counterterrorism Pursuit Team supported by the CIA, Colonel Azizullah Karwan (murdered in Kabul in June 2018²⁹⁰⁶) had been accused of extrajudicial killings of civilians, collective punishment and retaliatory killings from 2008 to early 2010.²⁹⁰⁷

According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, Bermel, Janikhel, Matakhan, Turwo, Urgun, Wormamay, Yahyakhel, Yosufkhel and Ziruk districts are 'contested', while Dila, Gomal, Gyan, Naka, Omna and Wazakhah districts are under Taliban control. LWJ noted that in July 2019, the Afghan government had admitted of not being in control of the district centres of Gomal, Gyan and Naka. Finally, Sarobi, Sarrawzah, Sharan and Zarghunshahr districts are listed as government-controlled or undetermined.²⁹⁰⁸ While LWJ claimed that Dila district had been overrun in July 2019²⁹⁰⁹, the UN Secretary General stated that the takeover had only been temporary.²⁹¹⁰ As for Wazakhah district, Pajhwok reported in March 2020 that for several years, due to the Taliban's blockage of the main road, it had been forced to airlift essential supplies.²⁹¹¹ Older information presented in a November 2018 AAN's report described the Taliban as fully controlling Naka and Omna districts, and the authorities as strong around the provincial capital and in Matakhan, Yosufkhel, Khaikot (Zarghunshahr), Urgun and Yahyakhel.²⁹¹²

2.26.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.26.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 168 civilian casualties (128 deaths and 40 injured) in Paktika province. This represents an increase of 11 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were search operations, non-suicide IEDs and air strikes.²⁹¹³ In its mid-2019 report, UNAMA had already pointed a 'notable increase' in civilian casualties in Paktika, 'with an especially high proportion of deaths compared to injured persons'.²⁹¹⁴ Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Paktika in the first half of 2020, reporting an increase during the second quarter compared to the first.²⁹¹⁵

In regard with the severity of the conflict, as in 2018, Resolute Support recorded between 301 and 500 enemy-initiated attacks in Paktika province over the full year 2019.²⁹¹⁶ In July 2019, Afghan news agency Khaama stated that 'the security situation in Paktika province [had] deteriorated during the recent months'.²⁹¹⁷ Moreover, UNOCHA reported that in December 2019, Paktika was among 'the top

²⁹⁰⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 53, 56, 58, 65, 74, 84

²⁹⁰⁶ Tolonews, Who Was Commander Karwan Of Paktika?, 29 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁰⁷ Clark, K., CIA-proxy militias, CIA-drones in Afghanistan: "Hunt and kill" déjà vu, AAN, 26 October 2017, [url](#)

²⁹⁰⁸ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., [url](#) However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

²⁹⁰⁹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

²⁹¹⁰ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 6

²⁹¹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Police officer accused of torture, extortion, 19 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹¹² Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁹¹³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

²⁹¹⁴ UNAMA, Midyear Update on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict : 1 January to 30 June 2019, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 3

²⁹¹⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69 ; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72 At the time of writing, UNAMA provincial data for 2020 was not available.

²⁹¹⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 69

²⁹¹⁷ Khaama Press, Clashes reported among Taliban militants in Paktika province, 16 July 2019, [url](#)

three provinces with the highest number of closed or damaged schools'. At the time, 117 schools had reportedly been forced to close due to insecurity.²⁹¹⁸ However, despite the 'volatile' situation prevailing in the province, RFE/RL noted that during the 2019 presidential election, Paktika had been one of the provinces with either a single polling centre closed or none at all.²⁹¹⁹ Nevertheless, on polling day, mortar grenades were launched near polling sites in Paktika, Paktya and Kunar provinces.²⁹²⁰

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED collected data on 325 violent events in Paktika province from open sources: 214 coded as 'battles' (66 %), 87 as 'explosions/remote violence' (27 %) and 24 as 'violence against civilians' (8 %).²⁹²¹

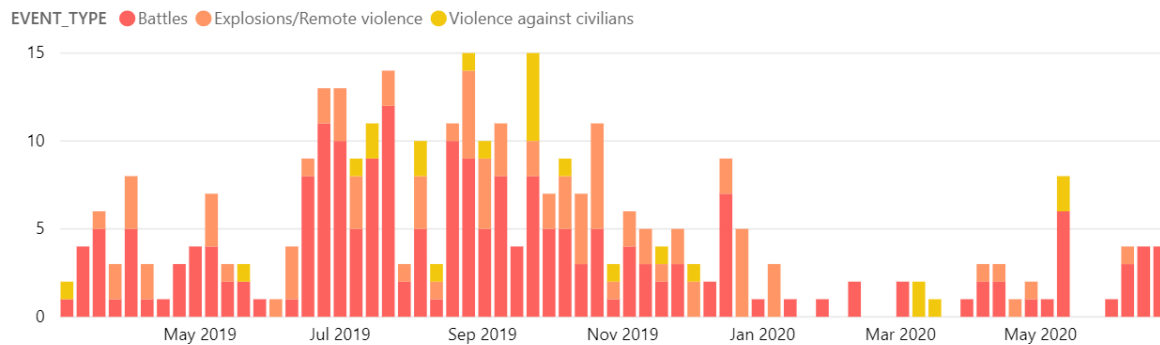


Figure 28. Paktika - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data²⁹²²

Across these three categories, Sharan (41 incidents), Bermel (35) Sarrawzah (35) and Matakhan (29) stood out as the districts where most violent events were reported between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. In each of Wazakhah, Dila, Ziruk, Sarobi, Janikhel, Zarghunshahr, Yosufkhel, Yahyakhel and Wormamay districts, between 10 and 20 events were recorded. Based on ACLED data, the least affected districts were Turwo (1 event), Gyan (4), Naka (5), Omna (7), Urgun (8) and Gomal (9).²⁹²³

Regarding events coded as 'battles' by ACLED, an overwhelming majority of them were 'armed clashes'. Sarrawzah (29), Sharan (22) and Matakhan (20) were the most affected districts by this type of violence. Conversely, Gomal, Urgun, Naka, Omna, Gyan and Turwo recorded less than five armed clashes. The remaining districts experienced levels of clashes ranging from 8 to 17. Of the 213 armed clashes that ACLED collected information about, 140 were said to have been initiated by the Taliban, and 8 others by them or an unidentified group.²⁹²⁴ Taliban attacks mainly focused on Sarrawzah, Sharan and Matakhan districts and only targeted ANDSF²⁹²⁵, except for one intra-Taliban clash in July 2019.²⁹²⁶ As for the approximately 60 armed clashes initiated by the Afghan security forces and allied militias, they were spread out across most of Paktika districts, with peaks of 12 attacks in Bermel, 9 in

²⁹¹⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (January 2020) 11 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁹¹⁹ RFE/RL, 'Ample Opportunities' For Fraud Bedevil Afghan Presidential Election, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁹²⁰ Bjelica, J. and Ruttig, T., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (11): A first look at how E-Day went, AAN, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁹²¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#) For more information on ACLED's methodology, see: Introduction – Sources.

²⁹²² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁹²³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁹²⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁹²⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁹²⁶ Khaama Press, Clashes reported among Taliban militants in Paktika province, 16 July 2019, [url](#)

Sharan and 7 in Wazakhah.²⁹²⁷ Examples of such incidents include two police raids ending in the killing of seven Taliban in Wazakhah and Sarobi districts, in December 2019.²⁹²⁸ During the second quarter of 2019, Sarobi district police chief was injured by unidentified gunmen in the bazar of Urgun district.²⁹²⁹ In June 2019, Bermel police district chief was killed by the Taliban.²⁹³⁰

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, the two most represented sub-categories were ‘Air/drone strikes’ (61 %) and ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’ (26 %). Bermel district clearly stood out as the most affected district by air/drone strikes (18 recorded out of 53 overall), followed by Sharan (7) and Matakhan (6).²⁹³¹ In April 2019, 18 people were killed in an air strike in Naka district. Afghan authorities assured that the victims were Taliban fighters, but the local population claimed they all were civilians.²⁹³² The most lethal strikes took place in Wormamay district, when about 105 Taliban fighters were reportedly killed over two consecutive days, in September 2019²⁹³³, although the group denied that it had lost that many members.²⁹³⁴ In December 2019, six members of the Haqqani Network were killed in an air strike in Bermel.²⁹³⁵

Out of 23 ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’ incidents recorded by ACLED, all of them were attributed to AGEs. Fourteen took place in Sharan, Sarrawzah and Ziruk districts. Three of these events made civilian fatalities and were said to have been carried out by an undetermined militant group.²⁹³⁶ On 23 July 2019, in provincial capital Sharan, two civilians were killed (including a child) and six others injured after a car bomb struck the vehicle of a police commander of Matakhan district.²⁹³⁷ In November 2019, at least seven civilians were killed when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb in Sarrawzah district.²⁹³⁸ The Taliban were also held responsible for three grenade attacks across the province.²⁹³⁹ The most recent one happened in Zarghunshar (Khairkot) district, on 3 May 2020, when a hand grenade thrown into a mosque wounded 20 worshippers.²⁹⁴⁰

In terms of attacks on civilians, relatively speaking, Sharan, Zarghunshahr and Bermel districts were the most affected (3 to 4 incidents each). Out of these 24 events, 17 have been attributed to Afghan forces and their NATO allies, and 7 to the Taliban.²⁹⁴¹ In March 2019, at least seven persons were killed by the Afghan police in Bermel.²⁹⁴² The New York Times reported that on 24 May 2019, ten civilians were killed

²⁹²⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁹²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban killed in Paktika operations, 19 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁹²⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktika’s Sarobi district chief shot injured, 18 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁹³⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktika’s Barmal district police chief killed in Taliban attack, 19 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁹³¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁹³² Pajhwok Afghan News, Paktika residents say civilians killed in Nika airstrike, 3 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁹³³ Ziar Khan Yaad [Twitter], posted on: 14 September 2019, [url](#); Afghanistan, Ministry of Interior Affairs, 90 Taliban Terrorists Killed In Paktika, 16 September 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Two Afghan Taliban shadow governors killed as air strikes step up, 15 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁹³⁴ Reuters, Two Afghan Taliban shadow governors killed as air strikes step up, 15 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁹³⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Haqqani rebels eliminated in Paktika airstrike, 17 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁹³⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁹³⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁹³⁸ Ariana News, Seven civilians killed in Paktika blast, 2 November 2019, [url](#); Afghanistan Times (The), Seven civilians killed in Paktika roadside bomb, 2 November 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁹³⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁹⁴⁰ Reuters, Taliban Truck Bombing Kills At Least Five At Afghan Military Center, 4 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁴¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

²⁹⁴² Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 civilians killed in Paktika raid, security forces deny, 10 March 2019, [url](#)

during a raid led by Afghan and US forces in Urgun district.²⁹⁴³ In this regard, from March 2019, UNAMA recorded 15 incidents and 62 civilian casualties (58 killed, 4 injured) attributed to the Paktika-based Shaheen Forces. As in 2018, violent incidents attributed to the KPF were not restricted to Khost province and affected Paktya and Paktika too. UNAMA expressed concern over the killing of several men, sometimes at close range, by pro-government groups during night raids at peoples' homes, calling it a 'disturbing pattern'.²⁹⁴⁴

Incidentally, in March 2020, Pajhwok reported on the brutality of Wazakhah district police chief, Barat, towards local dwellers, who accused him of killing and beating people, extorting money from shopkeepers and drug smuggling.²⁹⁴⁵

Taliban acts of violence against civilians include the killing of three civilians (including a child) in Zarghunshar district, in May 2020.²⁹⁴⁶

According to the UN Secretary General, during the second quarter of 2020, three human rights defenders were kidnapped and mistreated by the Taliban in Paktika.²⁹⁴⁷

Concerning health facilities, Pajhwok reported that in March 2019, unidentified persons had dynamited a health centre of Bermel district, a month after a similar incident had taken place in the same district.²⁹⁴⁸ Besides, according to the World Health Organization, four health care providers were killed in Paktika between January and November 2019.²⁹⁴⁹

2.26.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 2 317 persons displaced from Paktika – one of the lowest provincial figures recorded over the period. Except for 300 residents from Urgun and Gyan districts who were headed to Khost province, 86 % found refuge within the province.²⁹⁵⁰ Overall, the main districts of origin of IDPs were Dila (315), Gyan (287), Urgun (245), Sarobi (224) and Omna (210). The five of them accounted for almost 60 % of Paktika's IDPs. The highest displacement figures were recorded in July 2019, September through December 2019 and February 2020.²⁹⁵¹ In several reports from late 2019 and early 2020, UNOCHA suggested that ongoing conflict was responsible for many displacements in Paktika.²⁹⁵²

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 2 016 persons displaced to Paktika province. All of them were displaced within the province, mainly to Sharan (1 155), home to the provincial capital, and Urgun (686) districts.²⁹⁵³

²⁹⁴³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁴⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 58, 66

²⁹⁴⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Police officer accused of torture, extortion, 19 March 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁴⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁴⁷ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/897-S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 9

²⁹⁴⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Health clinic dynamited in Paktika's Barmal district, 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁴⁹ World Health Organization, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of 17 November, 18 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

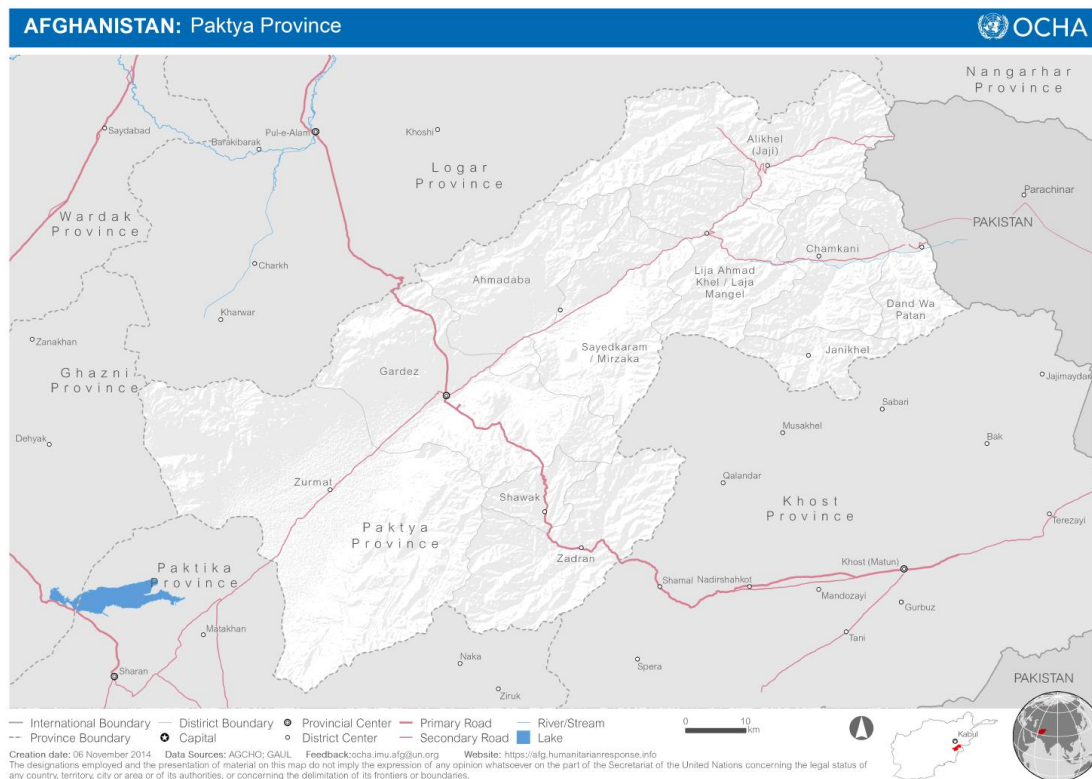
²⁹⁵¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁵² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 September – 6 October 2019), 9 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October – 3 November 2019), 6 November 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (10 February – 16 February 2020), 19 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁵³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

2.27 Paktya

2.27.1 General description of the province



Map 27: Afghanistan – Paktya province, source: UNOCHA²⁹⁵⁴

A part of Loya Paktya (i.e. ‘Greater Paktya’), an area also encompassing the provinces of Khost and Paktika²⁹⁵⁵, Paktya is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.²⁹⁵⁶ It borders Logar to the north, Pakistan to the east, Khost to the south-east, Paktika to the south and Ghazni to the west.²⁹⁵⁷ The provincial capital of Paktya is Gardez. The province is divided into the following administrative units: Ahmadaba, Alikhel (or Jaji), Chamkani, Dand Wa Patan, Garda Siray, Gardez, Janikhel, Lija Ahmad Khel, Laja Mangel, Mirzaka, Rohany Baba, Sayedkaram, Shawak, Zadran and Zurmat.²⁹⁵⁸ As of June 2020, the NISA described Garda Siray, Laja Mangel, Mirzaka and Rohany Baba as ‘temporary’ districts²⁹⁵⁹, meaning that they have been created by previous regimes or, more recently, under Presidents Karzaï and Ghani, and that their status has not been approved by the Afghan parliament yet.²⁹⁶⁰ In 2018, AAN added that Rohany Baba had been created out of Zurmat district.²⁹⁶¹ However, in its 2014 provincial atlas, UNOCHA respectively presented Sayedkaram/Mirzaka and Lija Ahmad Khel/Laja Mangel as different names referring to the same district.²⁹⁶²

²⁹⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁹⁵⁵ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktya’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 57

²⁹⁵⁶ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Paktya Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

²⁹⁵⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

²⁹⁵⁸ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Paktya, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 22

²⁹⁵⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 22

²⁹⁶⁰ Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁶¹ Khan P. & Ruttig, T., The 2018 Election Observed (1) in Zurmat, Paktia: Real voting only in the district centre, AAN, 29 October 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#);

According to the NSIA, the population of Paktya is estimated at 611 952 for 2020/21²⁹⁶³ and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Tajiks.²⁹⁶⁴ As reported by AAN, a small Shia community of mostly bilingual (Dari as a first language and Pashtu as a second) residents lives in Khwajah Hassan, in the north-east of the provincial capital. They belong to a group called Sadat (singular Sayyed), who are said to have been living in the area without conflict with the Sunni (Tajik and Pashtun) communities of the province and have actually fought along them to defend Gardez, since the Soviet invasion.²⁹⁶⁵ According to the BBC, there used to be a Sikh and Hindu minority in Paktya, Gardez City, but most of them have fled the province, with allegedly only one Sikh individual left in Gardez in the last years.²⁹⁶⁶

The Kabul-Gardez Highway connects the provincial capital to Kabul City crossing through Logar.²⁹⁶⁷ Another highway, called the G-K or Gardez-Khost Highway, passes through the districts of Shawak and Zadrar as well as through Khost province, and reaches the road leading to Ghulam Khan at the Afghan-Pakistani border.²⁹⁶⁸ Since the full reopening of the Ghulam Khan border point, in August 2019, the residents of Paktya, Paktika and Khost are allowed to get into Pakistan with their *tazkera*, under the condition that they have relatives living on the other side of the Durand Line.²⁹⁶⁹

In July 2018, Taliban militants were reported to search vehicles and look for government employees on the Gardez-Kabul Highway²⁹⁷⁰, abduct civilians²⁹⁷¹ and attack officials convoys.²⁹⁷² Moreover, the Ghazni-Paktya Highway was closed by Taliban militants after fights with the Afghan security forces in Ghazni province, in May 2018.²⁹⁷³ In March 2019, the Afghan authorities announced that they were now in full control of the 50 kilometre-road linking Paktya's Dand Wa Patan district to Khost's Jajimaydan district. For the previous five years, the highway had been under the influence of the Taliban and the Haqqani Network.²⁹⁷⁴

In August 2019, local residents complained that the 30 kilometre-long Gardez-Zurmat road, whose construction work was launched in April 2018, was still yet to be built, allegedly due to indifference from Afghan authorities and to attacks by the Taliban, who are said to be hostile to the project.²⁹⁷⁵ However, AAN also noted that they organised the rehabilitation of a part of the 52 kilometre-long Gardez-Ghazni road, requesting the local population to fund and take part to the construction work.²⁹⁷⁶

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Paktya has maintained its poppy-free status since 2013.²⁹⁷⁷

²⁹⁶³ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²⁹⁶⁴ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Paktya Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#); Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Paktia, n. d., [url](#)

²⁹⁶⁵ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktya's Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁶⁶ BBC News, *تنها بازمانده اقلیت سیک در پکتیا* [The only survivor of the Sikh minority in Paktya: I don't want to leave my city], 6 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁶⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Insecurity growing on Kabul-Gardez highway', 18 July 2018, [url](#); Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktya's Shias, 18 August 2018, AAN, [url](#)

²⁹⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Reconstructed Gardez-Khost highway inaugurated, 15 December 2015, [url](#); US, USAID, Gardez-Khost National Highway, November 2016, [url](#)

²⁹⁶⁹ Sabawoon, A. M., The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁷⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Insecurity growing on Kabul-Gardez highway', 18 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁷¹ Khaama Press, Taliban militants kidnap 22 passengers from Kabul-Gardez highway, 31 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁷² Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Insecurity growing on Kabul-Gardez highway', 18 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁷³ LWJ, Taliban blockade of Ghazni-Paktia highway enters second month, 9 June 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁷⁴ Tolonews, Afghan Forces Hold 'Full Control' Of Key Highway In Southeast, 31 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 months on, Paktians await work on Gardez-Zurmat road, 25 August 2019, [url](#); Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁷⁶ Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁷⁷ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

2.27.2 Conflict background and actors in Paktya

Paktya, a conservative province, mainly inhabited by Pashtuns, played a significant role during the Soviet invasion in the 1980s, the civil war and Taliban rule in the 1990s, as well as during the post-2001 years.²⁹⁷⁸ The province is home to many ex-mujahideen commanders who were members of the Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami-e Afghanistan (The Islamic Revolutionary Movement of Afghanistan), a traditionalist Sunni *tanzim*, or mujahideen-party, with a local and rural social base. Founded in 1979-1980 in Peshawar, it operated mainly in Paktya and Logar provinces, until many of its fighters joined the Taliban in the mid-1990s.²⁹⁷⁹ As of December 2015, the Harakat party has returned to the political scene as a more moderate movement among different *tanzims*. It has thus been seen by many as a 'bridge' for peace talks with the Taliban, due to its 'special relationship' with them.²⁹⁸⁰

Although Paktya province is witnessing an active insurgency²⁹⁸¹, a 2011 academic article quoted by AAN stated that historically, the majority of local tribes tried to avoid supporting one of the warring parties but kept contacts with all of them: 'In other words, the tribal system in Paktya obstructs or at least constrains the emergence of warlordism as well as the influence of the State.'²⁹⁸² The fact that the hostility of 'even a minor community' would be counterproductive for the AGEs 'discourages acts that would antagonise whole communities'.²⁹⁸³ For instance, in June 2018 Gardez City hosted a pro-peace gathering with tribal elders from Paktya, Paktika and Khost provinces, who pleaded the Taliban to agree to an extended ceasefire.²⁹⁸⁴ According to the aforementioned 2011 academic article, quoted by AAN, the exception appears to be the Zurmat district, where the weakened tribal structure provided AGEs with more opportunities to gain a foothold.²⁹⁸⁵

By 2011, according to AAN, even though Loya Paktya 'had not been Taleban heartland, [...] the Taliban had dealt with it reasonably well'. Important senior Taliban members, like Jalaluddin Haqqani, also came from Paktya province. Even so, in the first stage after 2001, the people from Loya Paktya overthrew the Taliban through tribal councils and supported the Afghan government. However, this mindset changed after the tribal elders of the region were excluded from the state-building process, which was mainly controlled by the new politicians in Kabul and Northern Alliance members.²⁹⁸⁶ In Zurmat district, a strategic 'transit corridor' for fighters from Pakistan to Ghazni²⁹⁸⁷, the Taliban had first to coexist with a powerful local family, the Mansurs, who joined them and obtained high-ranking positions within the Islamic Emirate, while retaining some autonomy until their influence gradually vanished.²⁹⁸⁸

²⁹⁷⁸ Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#); Ruttig, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, [url](#); Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

²⁹⁷⁹ Ruttig, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, [url](#) See also: Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁸⁰ Ruttig, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, [url](#)

²⁹⁸¹ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia's Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁸² Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁸³ Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia's Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁸⁴ Salaam Times, Hundreds of Taliban refuse to return to battlefield following ceasefire, 3 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁸⁵ Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁸⁶ Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

²⁹⁸⁷ Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia's Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, in: Giustozzi, A. (ed.), Decoding the New Taliban. Insights from the Afghan Field, Columbia, Hurst, 2009, [url](#), p. 34

²⁹⁸⁸ Bleuer, C., Sadat, S. A., Ali, O., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

In October 2018, AAN's Thomas Ruttig described Paktya province as a 'Taliban stronghold'.²⁹⁸⁹ As of May 2020, the Taliban shadow governor in Paktya was said to be Abdul Rahman Bilal, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network. He was appointed after the 'reshuffle' of the Taliban government structure during the 2019-2020 winter, ahead of the 2020 fighting season. Furthermore, Paktya was one of the provinces where Taliban forces were provided with 'increased supplies of ammunition and explosive materials'. The UN Security Council also named Mawlawi Qasam Farid as the head of the military commission in Loya Paktya.²⁹⁹⁰ At least in Zurmat district, Pakistani and Central Asian fighters have been reported to fight within Taliban ranks.²⁹⁹¹ According to security officials interviewed by RFE/RL in June 2020, some of the local Taliban freed by the authorities in the frame of the USA/Taliban agreement had resumed fighting soon after.²⁹⁹²

Moreover, Paktya is one of the provinces where the UN Security Council observed 'strong ties' between the Taliban and organised criminal groups involved in heroin and hashish traffics or local businesses extortion.²⁹⁹³ The Taliban have also been reported to collect taxes from truck drivers going from Paktya to Ghazni.²⁹⁹⁴

The Haqqani Network started to expand in Loya Paktya some years before 2011²⁹⁹⁵ and has now become powerful in Paktya province.²⁹⁹⁶ As of June 2019, according to Afghan officials quoted in a UN Security Council report, 1 800 – 2 000 fighters of the network were reportedly leading the Taliban operations in Loya Paktya, supported by Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants. The network was also said to hold all of the main Taliban shadow government positions (provincial governors and district governors) in Loya Paktya.²⁹⁹⁷ As of May 2020, the Haqqani Network was rumoured to plan a joint unit of 2 000 fighters with Al Qaeda, headed by Hafiz Azizuddin Haqqani in Loya Paktya.²⁹⁹⁸

In June 2019, the UN Security Council noted that many foreign terrorist fighters were active in Loya Paktya, where they benefitted from the 'remote terrain' and the limited capacity of the security forces to reach these areas.²⁹⁹⁹ Among these foreign AGEs, the UN Security Council listed the TTP, with 3 500 fighters across Kunar, Paktya and Paktika provinces³⁰⁰⁰, and Al Qaeda, said to number 400 to 600 fighters across 12 provinces and to be 'covertly active' in Paktya.³⁰⁰¹ UNAMA added that its main tasks consist in 'training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring'.³⁰⁰²

²⁹⁸⁹ taz, Nicht nur die Taliban als Problem [Not only the Taliban as a problem], 21 October 2018, [url](#)

²⁹⁹⁰ UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1888 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9, 25, 27

²⁹⁹¹ Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁹² RFE/RL/Gandhara, For Now, Fewer Former Afghan Prisoners Returning To The Battlefield, 23 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁹³ UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1888 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 12

²⁹⁹⁴ Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁹⁵ Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](#)

²⁹⁹⁶ Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁹⁷ UNSG, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1888 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), pp. 17-18

²⁹⁹⁸ UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1888 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 13

²⁹⁹⁹ UNSG, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1888 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 17

³⁰⁰⁰ UNSG, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1888 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 18

³⁰⁰¹ UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1888 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 12

³⁰⁰² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 85-86

As of July 2019, the UN Security Council described ISKP attempts to expand in Paktya as ‘unsuccessful’.³⁰⁰³

In terms of presence of government security forces, Paktya province is under the responsibility of the 203th ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.³⁰⁰⁴ As for the ALP, Paktya is often listed as one of the provinces where it is working well, due to the robust tribal structures of Loya Paktya and its tradition of local defence groups (arbaki).³⁰⁰⁵ However, in Zurmat district, due to abuses against civilians, the ALP unit has been disbanded in 2018.³⁰⁰⁶ According to AAN and Human Rights Watch, the 01 unit of NDS Special Forces (‘NDS 01’) and the Khost Protection Force (‘KFP’) operate in Paktya. Backed by the CIA, both have been accused of killing civilians in several raids in Zurmat.³⁰⁰⁷ In another report, AAN added that the KPF and NDS-supported ‘uprising forces’ hold posts along the Gardez-Tamir road.³⁰⁰⁸ Another pro-government armed group, the Paktika-based Shaheen Forces, also appeared to conduct operations in Paktya.³⁰⁰⁹

According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, Ahmadaba Alikhel (Jaji), Dand Wa Patan, Lija Ahmed Khel and Sayedkaram, districts were ‘contested’. The Taliban were reported to fully control three of them, apart from the district centre. LWJ also listed Chamkani, Gardez, Shawak and Zadrar districts as government-controlled or undetermined, and Janikhel and Zurmat districts as under Taliban control.³⁰¹⁰ Regarding Zurmat district, in several 2019 reports, AAN described it as a Taliban stronghold, the withdrawal of the ANA leaving only the district centre under the government’s control.³⁰¹¹

2.27.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.27.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 218 civilian casualties (78 deaths and 140 injured) in Paktya province. This represents a decrease of 49 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted/deliberate killings and search operations.³⁰¹² Resolute Support recorded between 102 and 150 civilian casualties in Paktya in the first half of 2020, reporting a marked increase during the second quarter compared to the first.³⁰¹³

In regard with the severity of the conflict, Resolute Support recorded between 501 and 1 000 enemy-initiated attacks in Paktya province over the full year 2019 – an increase in comparison with 2018 (301 – 500).³⁰¹⁴ In 2020, interviewed by AAN after the February ‘reduction in violence’ period had

³⁰⁰³ UNSG, Letter dated 15 July 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, 15 July 2019, [url](#), p. 15

³⁰⁰⁴ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

³⁰⁰⁵ Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN & Global Public Policy Institute, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 46-47, 93

³⁰⁰⁶ Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁰⁷ Ruttig, T., “Murder Is Always”: The Kulalgo night raid killings, AAN, 17 August 2019, [url](#); HRW, “They’ve Shot Many Like This” Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁰⁸ Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁰⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 58

³⁰¹⁰ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., [url](#) However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

³⁰¹¹ Ruttig, T., “Murder Is Always”: The Kulalgo night raid killings, AAN, 17 August 2019, [url](#); Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁰¹² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

³⁰¹³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69 ; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72 At the time of writing, UNAMA provincial data for 2020 was not available.

³⁰¹⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 69

ended, a local journalist stated that the Taliban had soon resumed attacks against security forces posts in the districts of Jaji (Alikhel), Zurmat, Sayedkaram and Rohani Baba (Zurmat).³⁰¹⁵ In April 2020, a resident of Shawak district observed that violence had remained ‘somewhat reduced’, due to weather conditions and longing of Taliban for peace. In Zurmat, a local elder noted that the Taliban had stopped pressuring people for food or questioning them about their travels.³⁰¹⁶

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED collected data on 651 violent events in Paktya province from open sources: 450 coded as ‘battles’ (69 %), 176 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ (27 %) and 25 as ‘violence against civilians’ (4 %).³⁰¹⁷

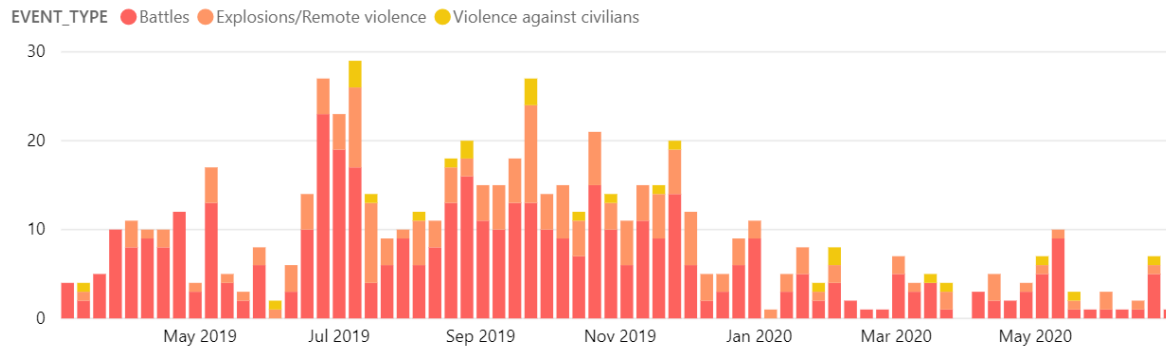


Figure 29. Paktya - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data³⁰¹⁸

Across these three categories, Gardez (177 incidents) and Zurmat (137) stood out as the districts where most violent incidents were reported between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, accounting for almost half of the total number. Between 30 and 70 violent events were recorded in Lija Ahmed Khel, Alikhel (Jaji), Ahmadaba, Zadran, Dand Wa Patan and Chamkani districts, and less than 10 in Laja Mangel, Mirzaka and Shawak.³⁰¹⁹

Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, an overwhelming majority of them were ‘armed clashes’. Half of these took place in Gardez and Zurmat districts, followed by Lija Ahmed Khel (45 clashes), Ahmadaba (32) and Alikhel (Jaji) (30). 85 % of the armed clashes were recorded as initiated by the Taliban against the ANDSF.³⁰²⁰ Examples of such incidents include a long-lasting clash, in June 2019, between Taliban and a police unit in Ahmadaba district. The overall death toll ranged from 35 to 50.³⁰²¹ On 29 May 2020, despite the extension of the Eid ceasefire, Taliban fighters killed 14 border

³⁰¹⁵ AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁰¹⁶ 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](#)

³⁰¹⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#) For more information on ACLED’s methodology, see: Introduction – Sources.

³⁰¹⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁰¹⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁰²⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁰²¹ NYT, Dozens Killed as Taliban Bombs in 4 Humvees Rip Through Afghan District, 30 June 2019, [url](#) ; Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 security personnel killed, 17 injured in Paktia attack, 30 June 2019, [url](#)

security agents while attacking a checkpoint in Dand Wa Patan district. According to security officials quoted by Tolonews, the Taliban ‘suffered heavy casualties’ too.³⁰²²

The Afghan security forces, along with coalition forces and pro-government militia groups, initiated 62 armed clashes, half of them recorded in Alikhel (Jaji), Ahmadaba and Zurmat districts.³⁰²³ For instance, during the summer of 2019, Afghan press agency Khaama reported that several Afghan special forces operations had taken place in the Taliban-controlled district of Zurmat.³⁰²⁴ During the first part of 2020, ACLED recorded 8 of the 16 ANDSF-initiated armed clashes between 8 and 17 May.³⁰²⁵

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, the two most represented sub-categories were ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’ (44 %) and ‘Air/drone strikes’ (39 %). Provincial capital Gardez was clearly the most affected district by explosive/IED attacks (30 incidents out of 78 recorded in Paktya), followed by Lija Ahmad Khel and Dand Wa Patan. All of them were attributed to the Taliban and, for a minor part, to unidentified armed groups.³⁰²⁶ For instance, in January 2020, a magnetic IED planted by an unidentified armed group killed one civilian and injured eight others in Gardez.³⁰²⁷

The only two suicide attacks recorded in Paktya also took place in Gardez, in March³⁰²⁸ and May 2020, when the Taliban took responsibility for the explosion of a suicide truck near an ANA facility, in a populated area of the city, killing 5 people (including 3 civilians) and injuring at least 14.³⁰²⁹ Zurmat district accounted for 27 of the 68 NATO and ANDSF-initiated air/drone strikes, with Alikhel (Jaji) and Sayedkaram as distant followers.³⁰³⁰ Most notably, in two separate incidents in Alikhel, 14 civilians were killed by drone strikes in November 2019.³⁰³¹ Meanwhile, the Taliban claimed responsibility for most of the recorded shelling/artillery/missile attacks. They primarily targeted ANDSF bases and checkpoints and took place in Zadran district.³⁰³²

Out of the 25 recorded events of violence against civilians, 14 were attributed to Afghan security forces and its NATO allies, primarily in Gardez, Jaji and Zurmat districts.³⁰³³ Such events include the killing of five civilians from a single family by the KPF, during a search operation against the Taliban in Zurmat district in March 2019. This incident prompted local residents to organise a protest in front of the

³⁰²² Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 security personnel killed in Paktia attack, 29 May 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 14 Border Forces Killed in ‘Taliban Attack’ Despite Ceasefire, 30 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁰²³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁰²⁴ Khaama Press, Afghan forces storm another Taliban prison in Zurmat district of Paktya, 6 June 2019, [url](#) ; Khaama Press, Afghan forces killed, wound 34 Taliban militants in Khost, Paktya: 203rd Thunder Corps, 13 July 2019, [url](#) ; Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces kill 2 Taliban leaders and their fighters during a raid in Paktya, 12 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁰²⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁰²⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁰²⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January - 2 February 2020), 2 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁰²⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 injured in Gardez suicide bombing, 23 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁰²⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 killed, 34 injured in Gardez truck bombing, 14 May 2020, [url](#) ; Reuters, Truck bomb in eastern Afghan city kills five, Taliban claim responsibility, 14 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁰³⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁰³¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁰³² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁰³³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

provincial governor headquarters.³⁰³⁴ Also illustrating this trend is the killing of 11 civilians on 11 August 2019, during a night raid carried out by the NDS-01 Special Forces Unit and US forces, in the Kulalgo area of Zurmat district. While Afghan officials claimed that the victims were Taliban fighters, family members and local elders denied it and added that they should have been questioned instead of being shot from close range. The Afghan authorities ordered an investigation on the matter but, several months later, its conclusions had not yet been made public.³⁰³⁵ UNAMA expressed concern over several similar incidents involving NDS Special Forces, the KPF and Paktika-based Shaheen Forces, but noted that the 25 civilian deaths attributed to the KPF across Khost, Paktya and Paktika in 2019 represented a 'significant drop' from 2018 and that almost all of them had been reported during the first quarter of 2019 alone. KPF search operations appeared to be less frequent during the remainder of the year.³⁰³⁶

The Taliban were held responsible for six events of violence against civilians by ACLED.³⁰³⁷ These included the murder of tribal elders in August 2019 and June 2020, respectively in Zadran³⁰³⁸ and Jaji (Alikhel) district.³⁰³⁹ Besides its high numbers across the three ACLED categories detailed above, Gardez capital district has also been the scene of increasing criminality. In June 2019, the city dwellers expressed concerns about the growing pattern of targeted killings by unidentified gunmen and robberies. This prompted the local police chief to announce increased efforts to tackle violence.³⁰⁴⁰ According to Pajhwok, in early 2020, the Taliban were preventing Paktya's health centres to receive medical supplies, reportedly because of their discontent towards the quality of services provided by the NGO in charge of medical supplies.³⁰⁴¹ In mid-February 2020, UNOCHA noted that 45 health care facilities had forcibly been closed by anti-government groups in Paktya, depriving up to one million people from basic health services.³⁰⁴²

During the September 2019 presidential election, local sources told AAN that only 5 of 22 polling centres in Zurmat district were actually open (and not 18, as claimed by the authorities), with 'very little' turnout, presumably due to fear of a Taliban attack. On polling day, mortar grenades were launched near voting sites in Paktika, Paktya and Kunar provinces.³⁰⁴³ The day after the election, a truck driver carrying ballot boxes to Gardez was injured by the Taliban in Zurmat district.³⁰⁴⁴

2.27.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 2 541 persons displaced from Paktya – one of the lowest provincial figures recorded over the period. Except for a couple of hundred IDPs who were headed to Khost, Wardak and Herat provinces, 90 % found refuge within the province, more specifically in Gardez capital district.³⁰⁴⁵ Overall, the main districts of origin of IDPs were Sayedkaram (798), Zurmat (567), Alikhel (497) and Janikhel (343). The four of them

³⁰³⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 64

³⁰³⁵ Ruttig, T., "Murder Is Always": The Kulalgo night raid killings, AAN, 17 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, U.S. Seeks to Reassure Afghan Military Amid Uncertainty Over a Peace Deal, 15 August 2019, [url](#); HRW, "They've Shot Many Like This" Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁰³⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 57-58, 64

³⁰³⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁰³⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁰³⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁴⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Rising targeted killings spark concerns in Gardez, 16 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁴¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Medical supplies to Paktia clinics yet to resume, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁴² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (10 February – 16 February 2020), 19 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁴³ Bjelica, J. and Ruttig, T., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (11): A first look at how E-Day went, AAN, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁴⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Special Report : 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#), p. 5

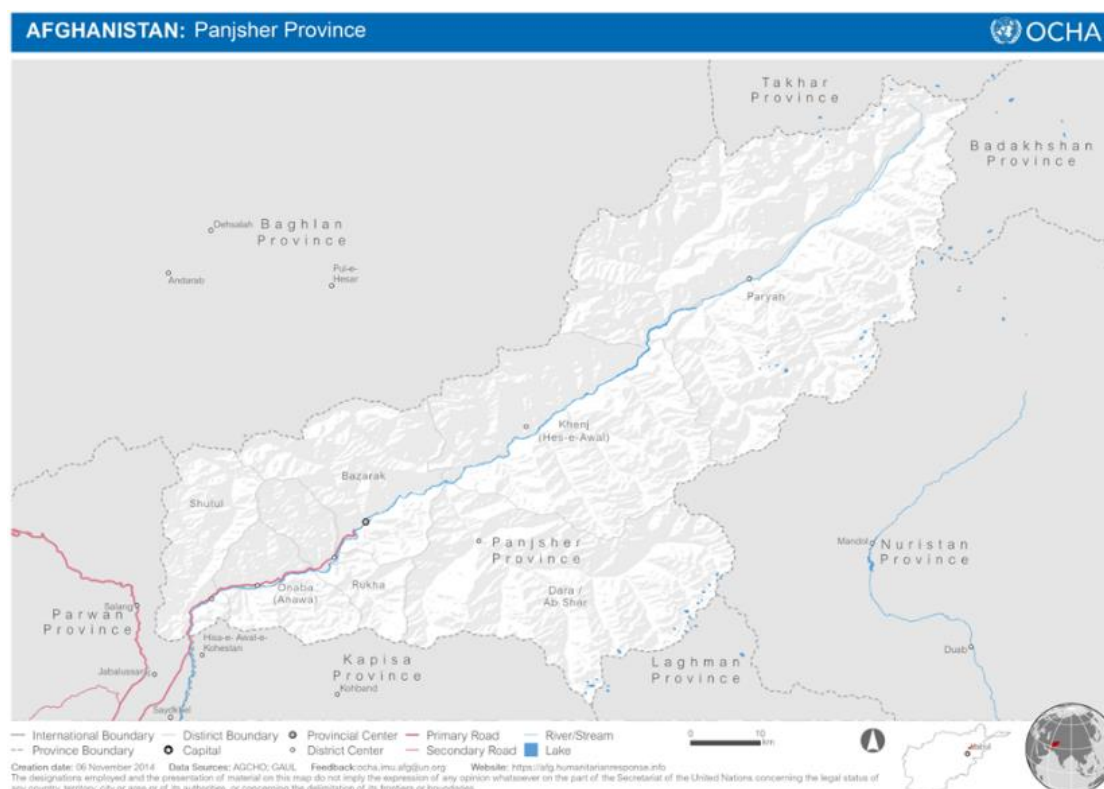
³⁰⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

accounted for almost 90 % of Paktya's IDPs.³⁰⁴⁶ UNAMA attributed the displacements recorded in July-August 2019 to insecurity.³⁰⁴⁷ As of 30 June 2020, all the displacements recorded in 2020 occurred in January and February, for the most part in Sayedkaram, Zurmat, Alikhel and Janikhel.³⁰⁴⁸

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 2 464 persons displaced to Paktya province, all of them to Gardez district. Outside of the aforementioned 2 303 people displaced within Paktya, 161 came from Logar.³⁰⁴⁹

2.28 Panjsher

2.28.1 General description of the province



Map 28: Afghanistan – Panjsher province, source: UNOCHA³⁰⁵⁰

Panjsher province is located in the central region of Afghanistan and has borders with the provinces of Takhar to the north, Badakhshan to the north-east, Nuristan to the east, Laghman to the south-east, Kapisa to the south, Parwan to the west and Baghlan to the north-west.³⁰⁵¹ Nearly the entire province consists of mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain³⁰⁵², located between the southern and south-eastern Hindu Kush mountain ranges.³⁰⁵³ The province is divided into the following administrative units:

³⁰⁴⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 - 11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Panjsher Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³⁰⁵¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Panjsher Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³⁰⁵² Afghanistan, MRRD, National Area Based Development Program - Panjshir Provincial Profile, n.d., [url](#), p. 1

³⁰⁵³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Panjsher Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

Bazarak, Dara (or Hes-e Duwumi), Ab Shar (listed as temporary district by NSIA), Khenj (Hes-e Awal), Onaba (or Anawa), Paryan, Rukha and Shutul. The provincial capital is Bazarak.³⁰⁵⁴

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Panjsher province has a population of 169 926.³⁰⁵⁵ The main ethnic group in the province is Tajik.³⁰⁵⁶ Other groups present include a minority of Hazara, Pashai, Nuristani and Ghilzai Pashtun.³⁰⁵⁷ A very small population of Kuchi is also reported to reside in Panjsher.³⁰⁵⁸

A road passing through Bagram district of neighbouring Parwan province connects Panjsher with Kabul.³⁰⁵⁹ The distance between Kabul and Bazarak is about 150 kilometres.³⁰⁶⁰ The deep and narrow gorge at the beginning of the Panjsher Valley, described as ‘tailor-made for obstruction and ambush’, has kept the province isolated and difficult to access.³⁰⁶¹ Panjsher province has no functioning airstrip and air traffic is regularly interrupted by bad weather conditions.³⁰⁶²

According to UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018, Panjsher province has maintained its poppy-free status since 2013.³⁰⁶³ UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52 % reduction in opium-poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region (including Panjsher province) and the central highlands.³⁰⁶⁴ Together with Balkh, Panjsher province is reportedly famous for its high quality Afghan hashish or *chars*, also known as *shirak*. According to AAN *Shirak-e Panjsher* has become ‘the most sought-after and expensive product on the Afghan market’.³⁰⁶⁵

2.28.2 Conflict background and actors in Panjsher

Certain regions in Afghanistan, like Panjsher province³⁰⁶⁶ and the area of the central highlands, have been described as relatively safe and less affected by conflict-driven violence.³⁰⁶⁷ According to an Afghan military expert cited by Tolonews, the relative stability of Panjsher as well as the central highland region is related to the social cohesion among its inhabitants, as most of them belong to the same ethnic or tribal group.³⁰⁶⁸

Panjsher province led the resistance against the Soviets and the Taliban during the 1980s and the 1990s. The province is home to Tajik Ahmad Shah Massoud, called the Lion of Panjsher, who fought against the Soviets and headed the Northern Alliance against the Taliban.³⁰⁶⁹ In September 2019,

³⁰⁵⁴ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Panjshir, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 17

³⁰⁵⁵ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

³⁰⁵⁶ NYT, Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#)

³⁰⁵⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Panjsher Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Panjsher Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

³⁰⁵⁸ Afghanistan, MRRD, National Area Based Development Program - Panjshir Provincial Profile, n.d., [url](#), p. 2

³⁰⁵⁹ Fox News, Afghanistan’s Beautiful ‘Green Zone’ Offers Emeralds, Peace, 23 May 2017, [url](#)

³⁰⁶⁰ Tagesspiegel (Der), Das Panjshrital in Afghanistan: Mit dem Stolz der Löwen, 4 March 2015, [url](#)

³⁰⁶¹ NYT, Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#)

³⁰⁶² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 11

³⁰⁶³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

³⁰⁶⁴ Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁶⁵ Foschini, F. et al., The Myth of ‘Afghan Black’ (2): The Cultural History of Hashish Consumption in Afghanistan, AAN, 10 January 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁶⁶ Fox News, Afghanistan’s Beautiful ‘Green Zone’ Offers Emeralds, Peace, 23 May 2017, [url](#); Tolonews, Local Forces Mobilize to Purge Taliban Threats in Panjshir, 2 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, At a Maternity Center Near a War Zone, 20 Births in One Day, 12 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁶⁷ National (The), Fears of Violence and Fraud Hang over Afghan Presidential Election, 26 September 2019, [url](#); An international organisation Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 13; Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 12, 51

³⁰⁶⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2017 Casualties: Nearly 25,000 People Killed, Wounded in Afghanistan, 14 January 2018, [url](#)

³⁰⁶⁹ NYT, Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#); Washington Post (The), ‘The Lion of Kandahar’: Was Slain Commander a Hero or Part of the Problem?, 29 November 2018, [url](#)

Ahmad Shah Massoud's son, Ahmad Massoud, was reported to have started a new political movement in Panjsher, aiming to establish an anti-Taliban and pro-decentralisation front, following the footsteps of his father's Northern Alliance.³⁰⁷⁰

The Panjsheris, as the ethnic Tajiks of the Panjsher Valley are called, are known for their historical opposition to the Taliban and went on to dominate the initial post-Taliban order in both politics and security forces. After the 2001 attacks, they were recruited by the first CIA operatives in Afghanistan.³⁰⁷¹ In 2012, about 70 % of NDS personnel originated from Panjsher or was connected to the Northern Alliance.³⁰⁷² In 2014, new and reinforced Afghan police checkpoints, mainly controlled by NDS agents, were set up across the road into Panjsher.³⁰⁷³ Many Panjsheris have been members of the Afghan political and military elite, like former CEO and current chairman of the High Council of National Reconciliation Dr Abdullah Abdullah or former NDS chief/Minister of Interior and now Vice-President Amrullah Saleh.³⁰⁷⁴ Panjsher's political spectrum is dominated by the Jamiat-e Islami party.³⁰⁷⁵

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated all districts of Panjsher province as 'government-controlled' or 'undetermined'.³⁰⁷⁶ After Kuran Wa Munjan district of neighbouring Badakhshan province was overrun by the Taliban at the end of July 2019, the militant group reportedly threatened Panjsher's Paryan district in the beginning of August 2019. LWJ referred to Paryan district as surrounded by several other districts controlled or contested by the militant group, such as Pul-e Hissar and Khost Wa Firing districts in Baghlan province and Mandol district in Nuristan province. According to Taliban sources cited by LWJ, there has been a long-term military interest of the militant group in gaining control over strategic areas such as Panjsher province.³⁰⁷⁷ In response to this possible Taliban infiltration in Paryan district in August 2019, dozens of former *mujahideen* fighters and members of public uprising forces were reported mobilizing alongside the Afghan national security forces, to defend the area.³⁰⁷⁸ Also in August 2019, the Taliban's deputy shadow governor for Panjsher, known as Abdul Ahad or Zulfikar, was killed in Nejrab district of Kapisa province. Zulfikar was reportedly a member of the Taliban's military commission for Panjsher and involved in activities of the militant group in several provinces in the region.³⁰⁷⁹

In March 2018, Afghan news agency Pasbanan reported on ISKP-affiliated individuals, belonging to two Iraqi families and operating under the shield of the pan-Islamic Tahrir Party, recruiting fighters in Panjsher province. They were reported to have settled in Dara (or Ab Shar or Hes-e Duwumi) district, after entering Panjsher through neighbouring Nuristan and Laghman provinces. The families were purportedly interested in getting control over the emerald and azure mines in Panjsher.³⁰⁸⁰ No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP have been recorded in Panjsher province between

³⁰⁷⁰ Asia Times, Afghanistan: Ahmad Massoud Seizes Father's Torch, 5 September 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Son of Afghanistan's 'Lion of Panjshir' Takes up Father's Fight against Taliban, 10 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁷¹ NYT, Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#)

³⁰⁷² Christian Science Monitor (The), Why Afghanistan's Intelligence Agency Has a Major Blind Spot, 23 April 2012, [url](#)

³⁰⁷³ NYT, Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#)

³⁰⁷⁴ Telegraph (The), Afghanistan's Former Spy Chief: 'Never Trust the Taliban', 13 August 2011, [url](#); NYT, Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url](#); NYT, Afghan Rivals Sign Power-Sharing Deal as Political Crisis Subsides, 17 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁷⁵ NYT, Players Say Soccer Chief Sexually Abused Them for Years. He May Still Win., 18 March 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁷⁶ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)

³⁰⁷⁷ LWJ, Taliban Threatens Panjshir Province, 4 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁷⁸ Tolonews, Local Forces Mobilize to Purge Taliban Threats in Panjshir, 2 August 2019, [url](#); LWJ, Taliban Threatens Panjshir Province, 4 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁷⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjsher Killed: Mol, 4 August 2019, [url](#); Ariana News, Taliban's Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjsher Killed, 4 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁸⁰ Pasbanan, Panjshir Is threatened by ISIS Recruitment, 8 March 2018, [url](#)

1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED.³⁰⁸¹ In a 2020 USIP report, analyst Borhan Osman mentioned Panjsher as an area where ISKP has been recruiting for its Kabul cell.³⁰⁸²

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Panjsher is under the responsibility of the 201th ANA Corps. Panjsher province is included in the Train, Advise and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-E is led by US and Polish forces and has its headquarters in Laghman province.³⁰⁸³

2.28.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.28.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented no civilian casualties in Panjsher province.³⁰⁸⁴ Resolute Support³⁰⁸⁵ recorded between 0 and 50 civilian casualties in Panjsher province in the first half of 2020, with no variation between the first and second quarter of the year.³⁰⁸⁶

ACLED collected data on six violent events in Panjsher province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which four were coded as 'battles', one as 'explosions/remote violence' and one as 'violence against civilians'. Four incidents were recorded in the western district of Bazarak. The other two incidents were registered in the southern district of Dara. In the rest of the province, no violent incidents were recorded.³⁰⁸⁷

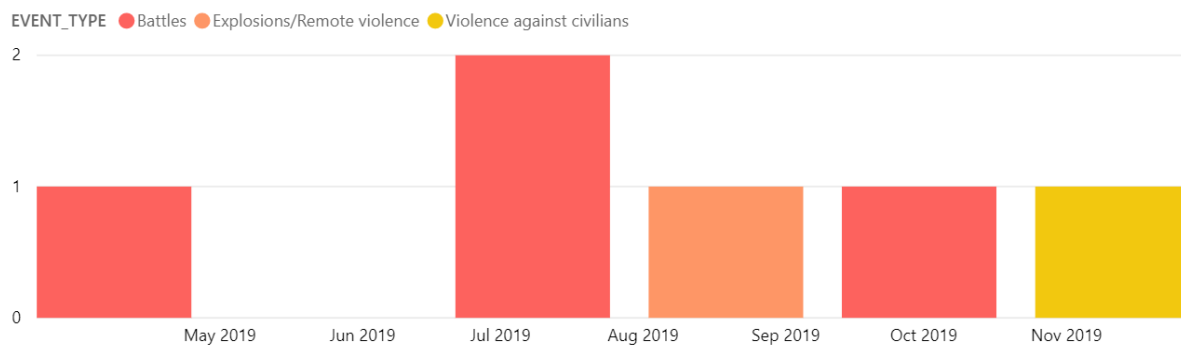


Figure 30. Panjsher - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data³⁰⁸⁸

The four 'battles' recorded by ACLED in Panjsher were all 'armed clashes' between Taliban militants and ANDSF forces, recorded in Bazarak and Dara districts in the second, third and fourth quarters of 2019.³⁰⁸⁹ The incident categorised as 'violence against civilians' was reported as a Taliban gunfire

³⁰⁸¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Panjsher; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁰⁸² Osman, B., *Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join Islamic State*, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 11-12

³⁰⁸³ USDOD, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020*, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 13

³⁰⁸⁴ UNAMA, *Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019*, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

³⁰⁸⁵ Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.

³⁰⁸⁶ SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

³⁰⁸⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Panjsher; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁰⁸⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Panjsher, [url](#)

³⁰⁸⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Panjsher; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

attack on an UNAMA vehicle, in November 2019. No casualties were reported.³⁰⁹⁰ The incident categorized as ‘explosions/remote violence’ was reported as a rocket attack by unidentified militants on Bazarak City, in August 2019.³⁰⁹¹ Additionally, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on three rockets that landed near the house of Panjsher’s provincial governor in July 2019, no casualties were reported.³⁰⁹²

Panjsher’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 reached around 25 %.³⁰⁹³ In the Asia Foundation’s 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 0-25 % of respondents in Panjsher province reported to have experienced fear while voting.³⁰⁹⁴

In June 2019, the Kabul-Panjsher Highway was reportedly closed in Onaba (Anawa) district by protesters demanding the release of an arrested criminal.³⁰⁹⁵

2.28.3.2 Displacement

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Panjsher province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020.³⁰⁹⁶

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 1 057 persons displaced to Panjsher province. The majority of these IDPs (749 individuals) came from Kuran Wa Munjan district of Badakhshan province, with a peak in April-May 2019 and a smaller number in August 2019, all finding refuge in Panjsher’s Paryan district. 259 IDPs coming from Nuristan’s Mandol district³⁰⁹⁷ in April, May and August 2019 found refuge in Panjsher’s Bazarak district. A small number of 49 IDPs from Dawlatshah district³⁰⁹⁸ in Laghman province found refuge in Panjsher’s Rukha district in April 2019.³⁰⁹⁹ Additionally, UNOCHA reported on displaced families from Tala Wa Barfak district in Baghlan province seeking shelter in Panjsher in June 2019.³¹⁰⁰

According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Panjsher province resided in Khenj (Hes-e Awal) district, followed by Rukha and Bazarak districts.³¹⁰¹ According to UNHCR, Panjsher is one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who originate there but choose to live somewhere else once they return.³¹⁰²

³⁰⁹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Panjsher; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, UNAMA Vehicle under Attack in Panjsher, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Panjsher; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#); Bakhtar News, Rocket Attacks on Panjshir Province, 20 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁹² Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Rockets Land in Panjsher, Causing No Casualties, 13 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁹³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 98

³⁰⁹⁴ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 62

³⁰⁹⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Panjsher Residents Protest for Release of Khurasani, 29 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁰⁹⁷ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 11 June 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³⁰⁹⁸ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 11 June 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³⁰⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

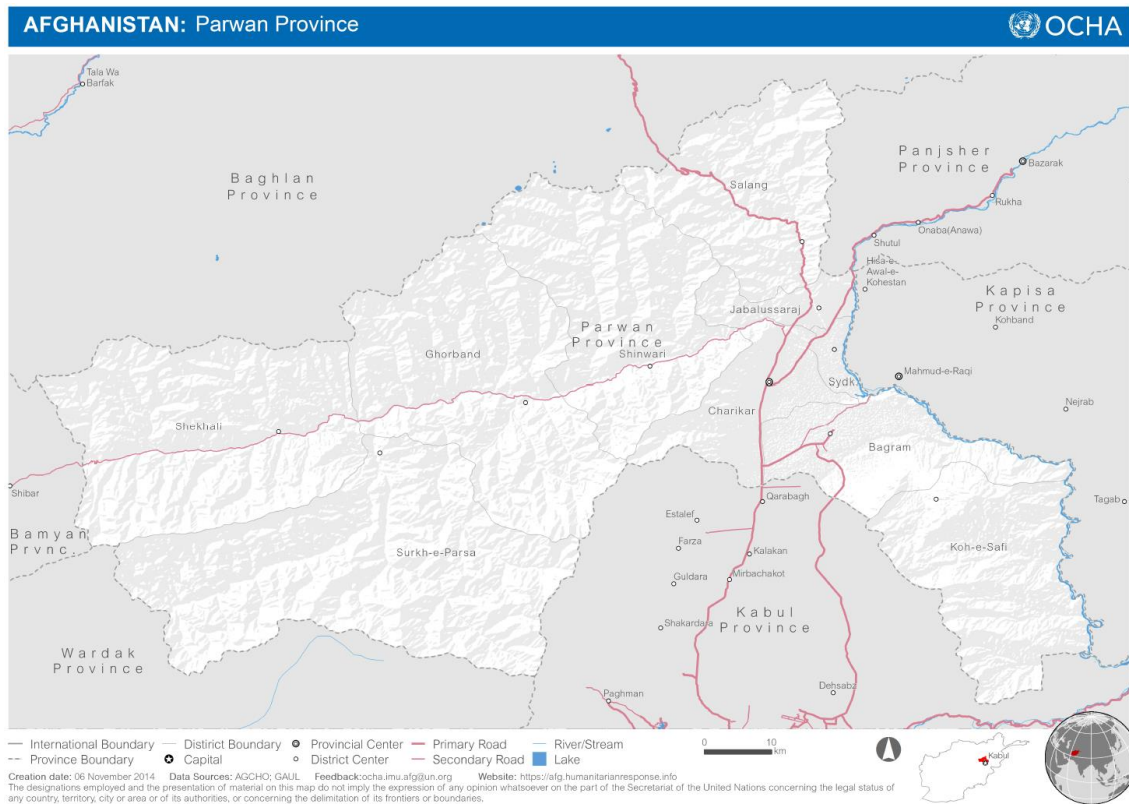
³¹⁰⁰ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 11 June 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³¹⁰¹ IOM, Afghanistan - Panjsher Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 6; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) I June 2019 I Province: Panjsher, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁰² UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report - Final Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

2.29 Parwan

2.29.1 General description of the province



Map 29: Afghanistan – Parwan province, source: UNOCHA³¹⁰³

Parwan province is located in the central region of Afghanistan and has borders with the provinces of Baghlan to the north, Panjsher and Kapisa to the east, Kabul and Wardak to the south and Bamiyan to the west.³¹⁰⁴ More than two thirds of the province consists of mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain.³¹⁰⁵ The province is divided into the following administrative units: Bagram, Charikar, Ghorband (or Siya Gird), Jabalus Saraj, Koh-e Safi, Salang, Saydkhel, Shekhali, Shinwari and Surkh-e Parsa. The provincial capital is Charikar.³¹⁰⁶

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Parwan province has a population of 737 700.³¹⁰⁷ The main ethnic group in Parwan is Tajik, with a presence in every district of the province. Other groups present include Pashtun, Uzbek, Qizilbash, Kuchi and Hazara.³¹⁰⁸ Shinwari district has a Pashtun majority and Ghorband district a significant Pashtun population³¹⁰⁹, as well as Koh-e Safi district.³¹¹⁰ Parwan's Hazara mainly reside in the districts of Shekhali³¹¹¹ and Surkh-e Parsa. According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig,

³¹⁰³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Parwan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³¹⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Parwan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³¹⁰⁵ Afghanistan, MRRD, National Area Based Development Program - Parwan Provincial Profile, n.d., [url](#), p. 1

³¹⁰⁶ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Parwan, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 11

³¹⁰⁷ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

³¹⁰⁸ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Parwan Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

³¹⁰⁹ Ruttig, T., Ghorband - A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](#)

³¹¹⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Parwan Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

³¹¹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Parwan Province Background Profile, n.d., [url](#)

Surkh-e Parsa is inhabited by a Sunni Hazara population, who ‘traditionally are at odds with their Shiite fellow-Hazaras in neighbouring Bamian and therefore have always supported Hezb-e Islami (HIG)’.³¹¹²

The Salang Pass tunnel, located between the provinces of Parwan and Baghlan and purportedly used by more than 10 000 vehicles daily³¹¹³, connects Kabul to northern Afghanistan.^{3114 3115} The roads leading to the tunnel have been in a bad condition and lack proper maintenance. Restoration projects are being assessed by the government.³¹¹⁶ In April 2020, USAID completed a power-infrastructure project next to the strategically located tunnel, through which reportedly over 80 % of Afghanistan’s north-south trade passes.³¹¹⁷

A highway from Kabul runs through the districts of Charikar, Jabalus Saraj and Salang to Kunduz province. Another highway connecting Parwan to Bamyan province runs through the districts of Charikar, Shinwari, Ghorband, Shekhali and the Shibar Pass.³¹¹⁸

According to UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018, Parwan province has maintained its poppy-free status since 2013.³¹¹⁹ UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52 % reduction in opium-poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region (including Parwan province) and the central highlands.³¹²⁰

2.29.2 Conflict background and actors in Parwan

Parwan province is described as among the relatively calm provinces in Afghanistan.³¹²¹ Remote areas, such as the Ghorband Valley³¹²², have been reported as the most insecure regions of the province.³¹²³

In 2011, AGEs started to expand their activities into Parwan’s Siya Gird (or Ghorband) and Shinwari districts, where the majority of the residents are Pashtun, and into Surkh-e Parsa district, where the Sunni Hazara majority sympathized with Hezb-e Islami (HIG) forces. The Pashtun areas of the Ghorband Valley have traditionally supported Hezb-e Islami during the civil war, but some of these structures have been absorbed by the Taliban since their regime in the 1990s. The Taliban in Parwan have also appointed Tajiks into their ranks to avoid limiting the insurgency exclusively to the Pashtun ethnicity. According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig, Parwan province has witnessed a long-established rivalry between Jamiat-e Islami and Hezb-e Islami (HIG), as several ethnic Tajiks affiliated with Jamiat were powerful strongmen and had important networks throughout the area. Many of them were in control of Parwan’s administration and have reportedly actively contributed to the insecurity in the region.³¹²⁴

³¹¹² Ruttig, T., Ghorband - A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](#)

³¹¹³ Xinhua, Feature: Afghanistan's Vital Salang Pass Tunnel in Dire Need of Restoration, 17 September 2019, [url](#)

³¹¹⁴ Telegraph (The), Through Mountain Passes and Taliban Land: the Longest Journey in the World for Covid-19 Samples, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

³¹¹⁵ Diplomat (The), Fixing the Salang Pass Tunnel, 21 October 2015, [url](#); Tolonews, Road Works Underway on Salang Pass, 1 September 2018, [url](#)

³¹¹⁶ Tolonews, Govt Reports Back on New Salang Tunnel Progress, 18 June 2018, [url](#); Xinhua, Feature: Afghanistan's Vital Salang Pass Tunnel in Dire Need of Restoration, 17 September 2019, [url](#)

³¹¹⁷ USAID, Salang Tunnel Substation Overview, 5 December 2019, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 142; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 147

³¹¹⁸ Ruttig, T., Ghorband - A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Parwan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, IDC - MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#), p. 5

³¹¹⁹ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

³¹²⁰ Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

³¹²¹ Khaama Press, Airstrike Destroys Car Bomb in Bagram District of Parwan Province, 8 May 2019, [url](#); Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), pp. 51-52

³¹²² Al Jazeera, Life in the City: Tackling Kabul's Urban Challenges, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

³¹²³ Khaama Press, Airstrike Destroys Car Bomb in Bagram District of Parwan Province, 8 May 2019, [url](#)

³¹²⁴ Ruttig, T., Ghorband - A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](#)

In December 2019, a clash between two former Jamiat-e Islami commanders in Siya Gird district resulted in several civilian casualties.³¹²⁵

The Kabul-Bamyan Highway, going through Jalrez district in Wardak province, has many side roads and mountain paths leading to several districts in Wardak, Parwan and Kabul provinces. According to AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, these serve as 'supply and escape routes' providing safe havens to militant groups and impeding the movement of government forces. For example, the unpaved road connecting Sanglakh in Jalrez district to Surkh-e Parsa district in Parwan is a difficult pass, neither safe nor accessible for military vehicles.³¹²⁶

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated Saydkhel, Koh-i Safi, Surkh-e Parsa, Shinwari and Ghorband (or Siya Gird) districts as 'contested'. A USDOD assessment of July 2019, reported by LWJ in the same map, designated Shinwari and Ghorband (or Siya Gird) districts as 'government-influenced'. Parwan's remaining districts were categorised as 'government-controlled' or 'undetermined' in this assessment.³¹²⁷

Sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in the districts of Shinwari³¹²⁸, Ghorband (or Siya Gird)³¹²⁹, Saydkhel³¹³⁰ and Koh-e Safi.³¹³¹ In August 2019, the Taliban reportedly closed eight religious schools in the districts of Siya Gird and Shinwari. According to Parwan's provincial governor, all eight closed *madrassas* were located in areas under Taliban control.³¹³² In the same month, local residents of Shinwari district, reportedly fed up with the Taliban presence in their area, set fire to a hideout/base of the militants in the village of Qala-e Qorhir.³¹³³ Several prominent Taliban figures were reported to have been killed or arrested in Parwan.³¹³⁴ In May 2019, a key Taliban member, identified as Hameedullah and purportedly involved in activities of the militant group in Ghorband district, was arrested in the district of Shinwari.³¹³⁵ In September 2019, a Taliban commander, known as Mullah Qudus, was killed in an operation near the provincial capital Charikar City.³¹³⁶ In April 2020, the Taliban's head of intelligence for Shinwari district, known as Noor Mohammad or Omari, was killed during an operation in the Azgard area.³¹³⁷ According to a May 2020 UN Security Council report, the Taliban ordered increased supplies of ammunition and explosive materials for their forces in Parwan province.³¹³⁸

ACLED recorded one security incident specifically attributed to ISKP in Parwan between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.³¹³⁹ In April 2020, ISKP claimed responsibility for a rocket attack targeting Bagram

³¹²⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Father, Son Killed as Ex-Commanders Clash in Parwan, 31 December 2019, [url](#)

³¹²⁶ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

³¹²⁷ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)

³¹²⁸ Salaam Times, Fed Up with Taliban, Parwan Residents Torch Militants' Hideout, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

³¹²⁹ Salaam Times, Fed Up with Taliban, Parwan Residents Torch Militants' Hideout, 29 August 2019, [url](#); Emergency - Life Support for Civilian War Victims, A Quiet Revolution: the Emergency Anabah Maternity Centre and Female Empowerment, 16 October 2019, [url](#), p. 27

³¹³⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Robbers Snatch Guns from Parwan Police Officers, 23 August 2019, [url](#)

³¹³¹ Emergency - Life Support for Civilian War Victims, A Quiet Revolution: the Emergency Anabah Maternity Centre and Female Empowerment, 16 October 2019, [url](#), p. 27

³¹³² Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Order Shutdown of 8 Seminaries in Parwan, 28 August 2019, [url](#)

³¹³³ Tolonews, Residents Set Fire To Taliban's Stronghold In Parwan, 22 August 2019, [url](#); Salaam Times, Fed Up with Taliban, Parwan Residents Torch Militants' Hideout, 29 August 2019, [url](#)

³¹³⁴ See sources mentioned below.

³¹³⁵ Ariana News, Taliban Shells Missiles on Bagram Airfield, 23 May 2019, [url](#)

³¹³⁶ RFE/RL, Afghan Officials: Taliban Suffers Heavy Casualties in Several Provinces, 22 September 2019, [url](#)

³¹³⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Parwan: Taliban's District Intelligence Head Killed, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

³¹³⁸ UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 9

³¹³⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

Airbase, no casualties were reported.³¹⁴⁰ Additionally, ACLED recorded one incident in December 2019 in which Afghan military forces responded to an attack by suspected Taliban and/or ISKP militants in Bagram district, as well as several incidents in which Taliban and/or ISKP militants were wounded or killed during air strikes or military operations in Bagram, Jabalus Saraj and Ghorband districts.³¹⁴¹ In a 2020 USIP report, analyst Borhan Osman mentioned Ghorband district as an area where ISKP has been recruiting for its Kabul cell.³¹⁴²

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Parwan is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps. Parwan province is included in the Train, Advise and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-E is led by US and Polish forces and has its headquarters in Laghman province.³¹⁴³ NDS unit 01, a paramilitary CIA-backed militia accused of human rights abuses, is reported to operate in the central region, including in Parwan province.³¹⁴⁴ Parwan's Bagram district hosts Bagram Airbase, the largest NATO military base in Afghanistan.³¹⁴⁵ Bagram town depends on the military base for its economy and supplies the base with a local work force, reportedly making it a preferred target for the Taliban.³¹⁴⁶

In December 2018, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on a growing number of Parwan's wealthy residents, such as high government officials, lawmakers, provincial council members and businessmen, leaving the province due to an increasing insecurity and incidents of extortion, intimidation and armed robbery. Some families reportedly moved abroad, the majority shifted to the capital Kabul and transferred their wealth to other provinces. According to a civil society activist, the armed groups causing these threats were reportedly often connected to local commanders and strongmen with close relations to officials in the central government.³¹⁴⁷

2.29.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.29.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 246 civilian casualties (65 deaths and 181 injured) in Parwan province. This represents an increase of 500 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were suicide IEDs, followed by ground engagements and search operations.³¹⁴⁸ Resolute Support³¹⁴⁹ recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Parwan province in the first quarter of 2020. According to Resolute Support, Parwan was one of the three provinces where the highest number of civilian casualties was recorded in the fourth quarter of 2019. However, this number declined significantly in the first quarter of 2020.³¹⁵⁰ In the second quarter of 2020, Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Parwan province.³¹⁵¹

ACLED collected data on 187 violent events in Parwan province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 93 were coded as 'battles', 81 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 13 as 'violence against civilians'. Bagram in the eastern region of the province stood out as the

³¹⁴⁰ RFE/RL, No Casualties in Rocket Attack on Largest U.S. Afghan Base, 9 April 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁴¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³¹⁴² Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join ISKP, USIP, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 4, 11-12

³¹⁴³ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 13

³¹⁴⁴ Clark, K., CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitaries Accused of Grave Abuses: New Human Rights Watch Report, AAN, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁴⁵ LWJ, Taliban Suicide Bomber Kills 3 Czech Soldiers, 5 August 2018, [url](#); Ruttig, T., First Breakthrough Toward Peace? A Look at the Seven-Day 'Reduction of Violence', AAN, 17 February 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁴⁶ NYT, A Growing U.S. Base Made This Afghan Town. Now It's Dying., 12 January 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁴⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Feeling Unsafe, Traders & Well-Off Persons Flee Parwan, 1 December 2018, [url](#)

³¹⁴⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

³¹⁴⁹ Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.

³¹⁵⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

³¹⁵¹ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

district where most incidents were reported, with 69 incidents recorded, followed by the centrally located districts of Charikar (where the provincial capital is located), Shinwari and Ghorband. Eight or less incidents were recorded in Koh-e Safi, Jabalus Saraj, Shekh Ali and Sayed Khel districts. In the rest of the province, no violent incidents were reported. Most violent incidents in Parwan province were recorded in the third and fourth quarters of 2019.³¹⁵²

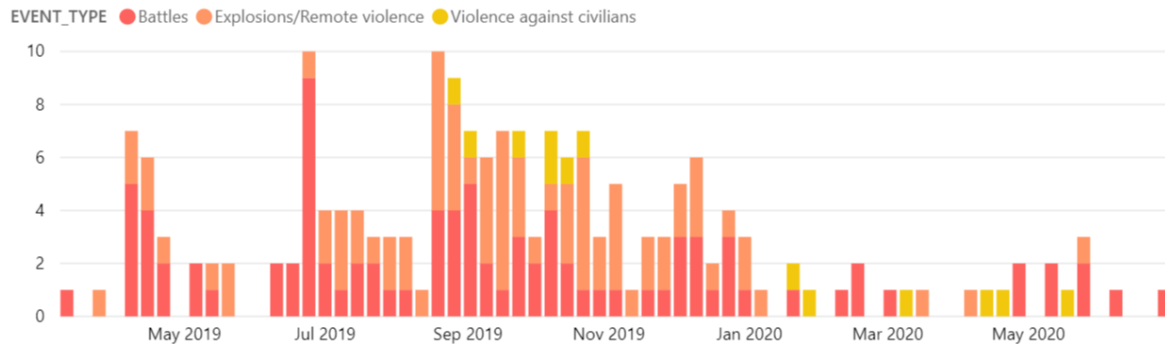


Figure 31. Parwan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data³¹⁵³

ACLED coded around 50 % of the violent incidents in Parwan as ‘battles’, all ‘armed clashes’. This category represented the most prevalent incident type in nearly all of Parwan’s districts -with the exception of Bagram district, where most incidents were registered under the category of ‘explosions/remote violence’. The majority of the armed clashes in Parwan were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police and NDS personnel as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis* (the term *arbaki* is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias).³¹⁵⁴ Examples of such incidents included the targeted killings of military, police and NDS personnel by gunmen in Bagram district in July 2019³¹⁵⁵, in Charikar district in June 2019³¹⁵⁶ and October 2019³¹⁵⁷ and in Jabalus Saraj district in December 2019³¹⁵⁸; as well as ambushes on police convoys, such as a Taliban attack on an ANP convoy on the Kabul-Parwan Highway in March 2020³¹⁵⁹; assaults on security checkpoints, for example in Siya Gird district in May 2020³¹⁶⁰ and in Koh-e Safi district in June 2020³¹⁶¹; and attacks on military bases, such as a Taliban assault on a medical facility attached to Bagram Airbase in December 2019, resulting in dozens of civilian casualties.³¹⁶²

³¹⁵² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³¹⁵³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan, [url](#)

³¹⁵⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³¹⁵⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, NDS Employee Shot Dead in Parwan, 27 July 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁵⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, One army Officer Shot Dead, Another Wounded in Parwan, 17 June 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁵⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, NDS Personnel Killed, Weapons, Explosives Recovered in Parwan, 11 October 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁵⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kapisa Police Officer Gunned Down, 29 December 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁵⁹ Tolonews, 'Taliban' Attack ANP Convoy in Bagram, 1 ANP Killed, 7 March 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁶⁰ Tolonews, At Least 7 Afghan Forces Killed in 'Taliban' Attack in Parwan, 28 May 2020, [url](#); National (The), Afghanistan: First Deadly Attacks Since Ceasefire Kill 14, 28 May 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, Taliban Delegation in Kabul for Talks as Officials Blame Militants for Deadly Attacks, 28 May 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁶¹ Tolonews, '17 Taliban Killed' in Parwan Attack: Official, 30 June 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁶² RFE/RL, Taliban Assault on Key U.S. Base in Afghanistan Kills Two, Wounds Dozens, 11 December 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, At Least Two Killed in Taliban Suicide Attack near US Base, 11 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Killed in Bagram Attack, Taliban Claim Credit, 11 December 2019, [url](#)

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.³¹⁶³ These involved operations in Charikar district in April³¹⁶⁴ and September 2019, killing a Taliban commander and several other militants.³¹⁶⁵ Two civilians were also reported killed in the April operation in two villages on the outskirts of Charikar City.³¹⁶⁶ In Bagram district, five Taliban militants, reportedly planning IED emplacements, were killed in an ANDSF raid in April 2019³¹⁶⁷ and a proclaimed Taliban attack coordinator was killed during an operation in June 2019.³¹⁶⁸ In Ghorband district, 40 Taliban militants were reportedly killed during an operation of the Afghan Special Forces in July 2019.³¹⁶⁹

ACLED coded 20 % of the violent incidents in Parwan as ‘shelling, artillery and missile attacks’.³¹⁷⁰ For example in May 2019, the Taliban fired several missiles at the US military base of Bagram.³¹⁷¹ In April 2020, an ISKP-claimed rocket attack shelled the same base.³¹⁷² In May 2020, several missiles were fired at transmission towers in the Gul Ghondi area of Charikar City.³¹⁷³ No civilian casualties were reported in these incidents. At the end of May 2020, three children were killed when a mortar shell fired by the Taliban (who reportedly denied their involvement in the attack) hit a civilian house instead of an ANDSF checkpoint in Ghorband district.³¹⁷⁴

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented 17 % of all reported security incidents in Parwan.³¹⁷⁵ For example in April 2019, a Taliban-claimed vehicle-borne (VB) IED attack close to Bagram Airbase killed and injured several American service members.³¹⁷⁶ Near the same military base in Bagram district, car bomb explosions were reported in August 2019³¹⁷⁷ and in March 2020.³¹⁷⁸ In August 2019, the platoon commander of a special unit was killed in a magnetic bomb blast in the second police district of Charikar.³¹⁷⁹ Some of these IED incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. This happened in September 2019, when an explosion in Charikar district killed one child and wounded nearly a dozen more.³¹⁸⁰ In May 2020, explosives detonated at the site of electricity transmission towers in Charikar City, causing several civilian casualties among employees from the country’s state electricity company Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS).³¹⁸¹

³¹⁶³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³¹⁶⁴ Tolonews, Two Civilians Killed in Parwan Operation: Official, 27 April 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁶⁵ RFE/RL, Afghan Officials: Taliban Suffers Heavy Casualties in Several Provinces, 22 September 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁶⁶ Tolonews, Two Civilians Killed in Parwan Operation: Official, 27 April 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁶⁷ Khaama Press, 5 Taliban Explosives Facilitators Killed in Parwan, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁶⁸ Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces Kill Taliban Attack Coordinator in Bagram, 25 June 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁶⁹ Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill 40 Taliban Militants, Arrest 13 Others in Parwan Province, 29 July 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁷⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³¹⁷¹ Ariana News, Taliban Shells Missiles on Bagram Airfield, 23 May 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁷² RFE/RL, No Casualties in Rocket Attack on Largest U.S. Afghan Base, 9 April 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁷³ Tolonews, 1 Killed in Latest of 4 Attacks on Power Pylons: DABS, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁷⁴ Tolonews, 3 Civilians Killed in Shelling in Parwan, 31 May 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁷⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³¹⁷⁶ NYT, Three Americans Killed in Afghan Blast, Despite Continuing Peace Talks, 8 April 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Three US troops, One Contractor Killed in Afghanistan Explosion, 8 April 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Foreign Forces Convoy Attacked near Bagram Airbase, 8 April 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁷⁷ Tolonews, US Forces Convoy Attacked in Parwan, 24 August 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Suicide Bomber Targets NATO Convoy in Parwan, 24 August 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁷⁸ Khaama Press, Mini Truck Packed with Explosives Goes Off Close to Bagram Airfield, 22 March 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁷⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Platoon Commander Killed in Parwan, 31 August 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁸⁰ Khaama Press, 12 Children Killed, Wounded in Parwan IED Explosion, 22 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019 (updated 26 September 2019), [url](#)

³¹⁸¹ Tolonews, 1 Killed in Latest of 4 Attacks on Power Pylons: DABS, 5 May 2020, [url](#); National (The), Why Blackouts Are So Common in Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#)

Air/drone strikes represented 4 % of all reported violent incidents in Parwan. Most air/drone strikes were carried out in Bagram district, for example in May 2019.³¹⁸² Two air/drone strikes were reported in Charikar district, one in Ghorband (or Siya Gird)³¹⁸³ and Jabalus Saraj districts each. The majority of these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces, some were attributed to NATO forces.³¹⁸⁴ While these air/drone strikes mostly inflicted losses among AGEs in the aforementioned districts³¹⁸⁵, some also caused civilian casualties - such as a drone strike on the village of Qala Jali in Bagram district in November 2019, according to the Taliban.³¹⁸⁶

ACLED categorised 7 % of all reported violent incidents in Parwan as 'violence against civilians'.³¹⁸⁷ These incidents involved the killing of Parwan's provincial prosecutor by the Taliban in Charikar district in October 2019³¹⁸⁸; the shooting of an off-duty NDS employee and two civilians while travelling by car in the Qala-i Naw area of Charikar City in February 2020³¹⁸⁹; the killing of six local contractors working at Bagram Airbase in April 2020³¹⁹⁰; the storming of a mosque in the Khala Zayi area of Charikar City by unknown gunmen (the government blamed the Taliban, while the militants accused the government)³¹⁹¹ in May 2020, causing more than a dozen casualties among worshippers³¹⁹²; and the shooting of a tribal elder by unknown gunmen in Charikar City in June 2020.³¹⁹³

Parwan's voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 reached around 15 %.³¹⁹⁴ In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 26-50 % of respondents in Parwan province reported to have experienced fear while voting.³¹⁹⁵ In the lead-up to polling day, on 17 September 2019, the Taliban carried out a suicide attack in Parwan's provincial capital Charikar City near an ANP training centre where an election rally for President Ashraf Ghani was taking place.³¹⁹⁶ The attack caused 81 civilian casualties (30 deaths and 51 injured)³¹⁹⁷, President Ghani remained unharmed.³¹⁹⁸ Commenting on the attack, the Taliban stated they 'deliberately aimed at disrupting elections'³¹⁹⁹ and they 'had warned people not to attend election

³¹⁸² Khaama Press, Airstrike Destroys Car Bomb in Bagram District of Parwan Province, 8 May 2019, [url](#); Ariana News, Taliban Shells Missiles on Bagram Airfield, 23 May 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁸³ Khaama Press, Airstrikes Kill 8 Taliban Militants in Takhar, Wardak and Parwan Provinces, 13 July 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁸⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³¹⁸⁵ Khaama Press, Airstrikes Kill 8 Taliban Militants in Takhar, Wardak and Parwan Provinces, 13 July 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁸⁶ Voice of Jihad, War Crimes of the Foreign Occupying Forces and Their Internal Mercenaries (November 2019), 4 December 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁸⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³¹⁸⁸ RFE/RL, Afghan Government Official Shot and Killed in Kabul, 13 October 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁸⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 Killed, NDS Worker Injured in Parwan Attack, 1 February 2020, [url](#); EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³¹⁹⁰ RFE/RL, Gunmen Kill Six Local Contractors near Main U.S. Base in Afghanistan, 17 April 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020 (updated 30 April 2020), [url](#)

³¹⁹¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 21 May 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁹² Al Jazeera, Gunmen Attack Afghanistan Mosque Killing Many Worshippers, 19 May 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban's Claims Regarding the Deadly Mosque Attack in Parwan Province, 19 May 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Death Toll Rises to 11 in Parwan Mosque Attack: Residents, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁹³ Tolonews, Tribal Elder Killed in Attack by Unknown Gunmen in Parwan, 11 June 2020, [url](#)

³¹⁹⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 98

³¹⁹⁵ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 62

³¹⁹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 25 Dead, 42 Wounded in Blast near Ghani Rally, 17 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Taliban Make Good on Pledge to Strike Afghan Election Campaign, 17 September 2019, [url](#); BBC News, Afghanistan War: Taliban Bombs Election Rally and Kabul Square, 17 September 2019, [url](#)

³¹⁹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#) p. 3

³¹⁹⁸ Al Jazeera, Taliban Suicide Attacks Kill at least 48 before Afghan Elections, 17 September, [url](#)

³¹⁹⁹ Guardian (The), Taliban Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan Leave Dozens Dead, 17 September 2019, [url](#)

gatherings as they were considered military targets'.³²⁰⁰ The Taliban claimed to have blocked roads and attacked security forces personnel transporting election material the day before polling day in Parwan.³²⁰¹ Without providing further details, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on seven election related assaults on polling day in Parwan province, including the threatening of two observers in Siya Gird district³²⁰² and a clash in the provincial capital Charikar City resulting in the killing of one individual.³²⁰³ The Taliban reportedly fired rockets towards a school used as polling centre in Siya Gird district on the day of 28 September. One of the rockets landed on a residential home, causing several civilian casualties.³²⁰⁴ In the evening of election day, eight employees from the Independent Election Commission (IEC) were abducted by the Taliban in the Namak Aab area of Shinwari district.³²⁰⁵ After the mediation from tribal elders, they were released in December 2019.³²⁰⁶

On the highways connecting Parwan to its neighbouring provinces and to the capital security incidents have been reported, such as clashes between Taliban militants and Afghan security forces.³²⁰⁷ In April 2019, the Kabul-Parwan Highway, passing through Charikar City, was reportedly closed due to protests after several civilians were killed in an ANDSF operation.³²⁰⁸

2.29.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 42 persons displaced from Parwan province, constituting a group of 6 families coming from Shinwari district and finding refuge within the province itself (in Charikar district) in August 2019.³²⁰⁹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 441 persons displaced to Parwan coming from other provinces. Almost half of the IDPs (210 individuals) were displaced from Qaysar district in Faryab³²¹⁰ province in May and July 2019 and found refuge in Parwan's Charikar district. Smaller numbers of people displaced from the provinces of Kapisa³²¹¹ (Tagab district), Kunduz (Chardara and Aliabad districts), Badakhshan (Kuran Wa Munjan district), Baghlan (Nahrin district), Kunar³²¹² (Shigal Wa Sheltan district) and Laghman (Dawlatshah district) found refuge in Parwan's Charikar, Bagram and Jabalus Saraj districts.³²¹³

According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Parwan province resided in Bagram district, followed by Koh-e Safi and Charikar districts.³²¹⁴

³²⁰⁰ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#) p. 3

³²⁰¹ Reuters, Taliban Worries Loom as Afghanistan Prepares to Vote for a President, 27 September 2019, [url](#)

³²⁰² Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Observers Killed, Many Beaten on Polling Day, 17 October 2019, [url](#)

³²⁰³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 Killed, 123 Wounded in Election Day Attacks, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

³²⁰⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 4-5

³²⁰⁵ Reuters, Afghan Election Set to See Big Drop in Voter Numbers, 29 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Efforts Ongoing for Release of Election Workers, 1 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, [url](#) p. 5

³²⁰⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Free 8 Election Workers in Parwan, 9 December 2019, [url](#)

³²⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Parwan-Bamyan Highway Closed amid Fierce Clash, 27 July 2017, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Suffer Heavy Casualties in Parwan, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

³²⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Protestors Close Kabul-Parwan Highway after Civilian Deaths, 27 April 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Two Civilians Killed in Parwan Operation: Official, 27 April 2019, [url](#)

³²⁰⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

³²¹⁰ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Parwan Province - Meeting Summary, 30 May 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab Families Displaced to Parwan in Need of Help, 8 July 2019, [url](#)

³²¹¹ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Parwan Province - Meeting Summary, 30 May 2019, [url](#), p. 1

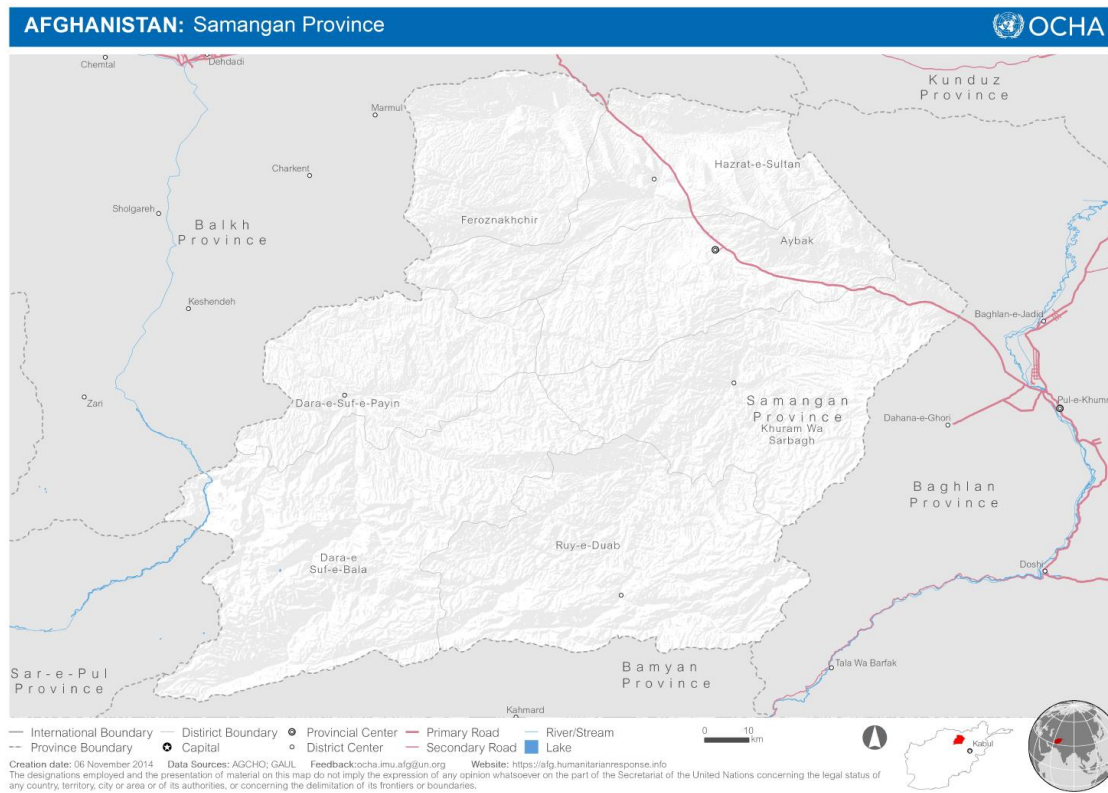
³²¹² UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Parwan Province - Meeting Summary, 30 May 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³²¹³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

³²¹⁴ IOM, Afghanistan - Parwan Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 6; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) I June 2019 I Province: Parwan, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

2.30 Samangan

2.30.1 General description of the province



Map 30: Afghanistan – Samangan province, source: UNOCHA³²¹⁵

Samangan province is located in the north of Afghanistan and has borders with Balkh province to the north and north-east, Baghlan to the east, Bamiyan to the south and Sar-e Pul to the west. Samangan province is divided into the following administrative units: Aybak, Dara-i-Suf-e-Payin (Lower Dara-i-Suf), Dara-i-Suf-e-Bala (Upper Dara-i-Suf), Feroznakhchir, Hazrat-e-Sultan, Khuram Wa Sarbagh and Ruy-e-Duab.³²¹⁶ The provincial capital of Samangan is Samangan City, formerly known and still often referred to as Aybak.³²¹⁷

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 430 489, 118 537 of whom live in the provincial capital, Aybak.³²¹⁸ Ethnic groups present in Samangan province are Tajiks, Uzbeks, Pashtuns, Hazaras, Arabs, Tatars³²¹⁹ and Aimaq.³²²⁰

The province lies strategically, to the north of the Hindu Kush.³²²¹ A section of the Ring Road (Highway One) from Kabul to Mazar-e Sharif crosses Samangan's districts of Khuram wa Sarbagh, Aybak and Hazrat-e-Sultan and connects Samangan to the northern provinces until Herat.³²²²

³²¹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Samangan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³²¹⁶ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Samangan, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 30

³²¹⁷ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

³²¹⁸ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 30

³²¹⁹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Samangan Provincial Review, n.d., [url](#)

³²²⁰ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Samangan, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

³²²¹ RFE/RL, Afghanistan's New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](#)

³²²² Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Samangan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

In October 2018, the Taliban reportedly increased taxes on trucks transporting coal from mines in Dara-i-Suf district.³²²³ By December 2019 provincial council members and truck drivers accused both security forces and Taliban from extorting money.³²²⁴

Afghanistan Analyst Obaid Ali points out that control of Dara-I Suf-e Payin district's coal mines is a driving force that exacerbates the conflict in that district.³²²⁵ According to The Liaison Office (TLO), Dand-e Toor and Gramak areas of the district are housing most illegally mined coals deposits in Afghanistan. Over 350 illegal mines are overseen by politicians, warlords and local power brokers.³²²⁶

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Samangan province lost its poppy-free status in 2017. Opium poppy-cultivation decreased by 2 % and therefore remained stable compared to 2017. The main opium poppy-cultivating districts were Lower Dara-I Suf and Upper Dara-I Suf.³²²⁷

2.30.2 Conflict background and actors in Samangan

Having been more secure in comparison to neighbouring Baghlan, more attacks, incursions by the Taliban and fighting were reported from early 2016 onwards in Samangan province.³²²⁸

Around the time of the presidential elections in September 2019 the Taliban's presence and control in Dara-i-Suf-e-Payin district had grown. It was the only district, out of six, in Samangan province that was mostly controlled by the Taliban. In the other districts the government presence was higher. In previous years control over Dara-I Suf-e Payin's district centre had switched several times between government forces and the Taliban.³²²⁹ Taliban claims of having taken control over the district on 27 September 2019 were denied by a local government official³²³⁰, but in October 2019, a provincial council representative claimed that the Taliban controlled the Dara-i-Suf - Aybak and Dara-i-Suf - Mazar-e-Sharif Highways, adding that they had also been in control of Dara-i-Suf-e-Bala and Dara-i Suf-e Payin districts' roads that connect both districts with Samangan City for the last three years and had taken control of roads between the two districts and Mazar-e-Sharif City.³²³¹ In that same month the district governor claimed that all areas of Dara-i-Suf-e Payin were under control of the Taliban except for the district centre.³²³² In May 2020, Afghanistan analyst Thomas Ruttig reported frequent Taliban activity in mostly Taliban-controlled Dara-i Suf-e Payin and government-controlled Dara-i Suf-e Bala districts.³²³³ As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Dara-i Suf-e Payin district as 'Taliban-controlled', Aybak district as 'contested' and the remaining districts in Samangan province as 'government-controlled'.³²³⁴

According to governmental sources quoted by Pajhwok Afghan News in April 2018, 'dozens' of illegal armed groups were active in Samangan³²³⁵, as were pro-government militias.³²³⁶

³²²³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban increase tax on coal trucks in Samangan, 29 October 2019, [url](#)

³²²⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces, Taliban extort money on Mazar-Dara-i-Suf road, 9 December 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Drivers Protest Extortion on Key Northern Highway, 20 December 2019, [url](#)

³²²⁵ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

³²²⁶ TLO, The Real Cost of Coal, n.d., [url](#)

³²²⁷ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 25

³²²⁸ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

³²²⁹ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

³²³⁰ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces among 17 killed in Samangan attack, 27 September 2019, [url](#)

³²³¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban increase tax on coal trucks in Samangan, 29 October 2019, [url](#)

³²³² Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban increase tax on coal trucks in Samangan, 29 October 2019, [url](#)

³²³³ Ruttig, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balkhab District: Are the Taleban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

³²³⁴ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

³²³⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Dozens of illegal armed group active in Samangan, 8 April 2018, [url](#)

³²³⁶ Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, [url](#)

No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Samangan between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.³²³⁷

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Samangan province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps. Samangan province is included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.³²³⁸

2.30.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.30.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 45 civilian casualties (11 deaths and 34 injured) in Samangan. This represents a decrease of 2 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted/deliberate killings and non-suicide IEDs.³²³⁹ Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 50 civilian casualties in Samangan in the first half of 2020, reporting similar numbers of civilian casualties between the first and the second quarter of 2020.³²⁴⁰

ACLED collected data on 84 violent events in Samangan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 70 of which were coded as battles, 10 as explosions/remote violence and 4 as violence against civilians.³²⁴¹ Dara-i Suf-e Payin stood out as the district where most incidents were reported, with 31 incidents, registered by ACLED. No violent events were registered by ACLED in Feroznakhchir district.³²⁴²

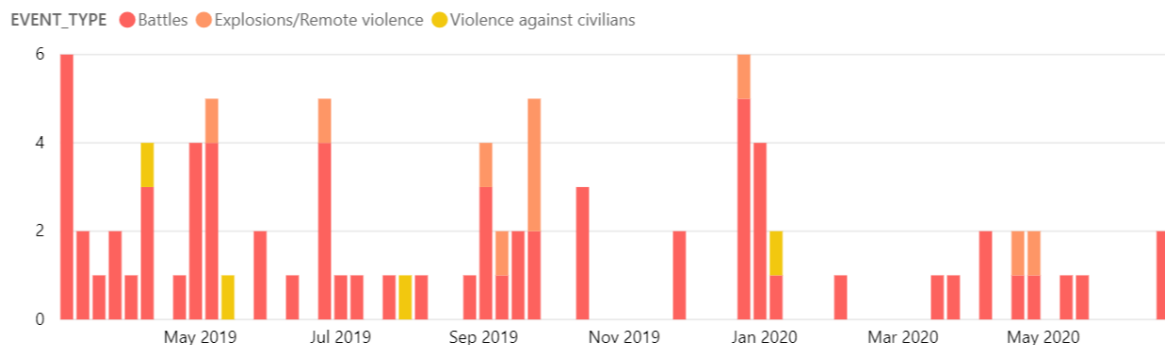


Figure 32. Samangan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data³²⁴³

³²³⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³²³⁸ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12, p. 50; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

³²³⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94. No UNAMA data on civilian casualties in Samangan province were available for the first half of 2020.

³²⁴⁰ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

³²⁴¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³²⁴² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³²⁴³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Samangan, [url](#)

ACLED coded 83 % of the violent incidents in Samangan province as battles, nearly all armed clashes. The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces³²⁴⁴, including military, police or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or local uprising forces³²⁴⁵, or attacks on their facilities such as checkpoints³²⁴⁶ and military bases.³²⁴⁷ As a result of a Taliban attack on a village in Samangan City on 1 May 2019 that killed three pro-government militia members, the head of the Junbish political party was also killed.³²⁴⁸

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, such as in Dara-i Suf-e Payin district in March and December 2019³²⁴⁹ in Samangan/Aybak City in October 2019³²⁵⁰, were also registered under armed clashes.³²⁵¹

The Taliban attacked Dara-i-Suf-e-Payin district a few times in the reporting period.³²⁵² In January 2020 the a Taliban group attack on the centre of Dara-iSuf-e Payin was repelled.³²⁵³ According to Afghanistan analyst Thomas Ruttig the Taliban attacked Dara-i-Suf-e Bala district several times in April 2020.³²⁵⁴

In April 2019 a clash broke out between members of two illegal armed groups in Samangan/Aybak City. Two members were killed as a result.³²⁵⁵

Out of ten incidents categorised by ACLED under explosions/remote violence, six were air strikes carried out by Afghan forces in both Dara-i Suf districts³²⁵⁶, inflicting losses among AGEs.³²⁵⁷ ACLED registered three incidents which involved the use IEDs, including the detonation of an IED inside a mosque during Friday prayers on 28 June 2019. Sources told UNAMA the Taliban were targeting the mullah for praising the ANDSF. As a result of the explosion 14 civilians were injured.³²⁵⁸ Rocket attacks

³²⁴⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³²⁴⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 1-7, 7 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 pro-govt militiamen killed in Jawzjan, Samangan, 26 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban kills 13 Afghan soldiers in Balkh province, 1 May 2020, [url](#)

³²⁴⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 8-14, 14 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 police killed and wounded in Samangan attack, 12 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 Taliban, 2 police killed in Badghis, Samangan clashes, 2 April 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 local security personnel killed in Samangan attack, 24 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

³²⁴⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

³²⁴⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, [url](#)

³²⁴⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Taliban killed in Samangan operation, 22 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's military leader among 11 killed in Samangan clash, 28 December 2019, [url](#)

³²⁵⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 militants killed, 11 wounded in Samangan operation, 20 October 2019, [url](#)

³²⁵¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³²⁵² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

³²⁵³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's groups attack on Dara-i-Souf Paen district repulsed, 3 January 2020, [url](#)

³²⁵⁴ Ruttig, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balkhab District: Are the Taleban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

³²⁵⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 23 April 2019, [url](#)

³²⁵⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's shadow governor killed in airstrike, 15 September 2019, [url](#)

³²⁵⁷ UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 10; Khaama Press, Taliban militants suffer heavy casualties in preemptive airstrikes in Samangan, 30 April 2020, [url](#)

³²⁵⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#); UNAMA, Midyear Update On The Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict: 1 January To 30 June 2019, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 7

launched by the Taliban on 11 May 2019 in Dara-i Suf-e Payin district hit the house of the family of a pro-government militia commander, killing five family members and injuring 10.³²⁵⁹

Four incidents categorised by ACLED as violence against civilians included the kidnapping of 60 truck drivers in April 2019 in Dara-i Suf-e Bala district for refusing to pay toll at the checkpoint set up by the Taliban³²⁶⁰, the killing of civilians by the Taliban in an area under their control in Dara-i Suf-e Payin district in January 2020³²⁶¹ and the sexual assault on a midwife working at a clinic in Ruy-e Duab district in May 2019.³²⁶² Nine individuals were detained in connection to the assault on the midwife.³²⁶³ In addition to those registered by ACLED, UNAMA documented two other incidents of abduction by the Taliban. After setting up a checkpoint on a main road in Dara-i Suf-e Payin district on 29 July 2019, they abducted 25 truck drivers who were transporting coal. The men were released once they had paid the Taliban.³²⁶⁴ The Taliban abducted five staff members of an international demining agency in Ruy-e Duab district on 14 September 2019. The men were released two weeks later.³²⁶⁵ Also official sources informed about the kidnapping of Dara-i Suf-e Bala district chief and two of his guards in Dara-i Suf-e Payin district on 24 February 2020.³²⁶⁶

There were reports from the northern region, which includes Samangan province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019. Private mobile companies were warned to close down their networks until after the presidential election. By the end of September, early October 2019 all networks started functioning again.³²⁶⁷

Analyst Obaid Ali described the security situation in Samangan in the presidential election period as relatively better as compared to Kunduz or Baghlan. Insecurity, in particular Taliban shelling, reportedly hindered the conduct of the elections in some parts of Ruy-e Duab, Khuram wa Sarbagh and Hazrat-e-Sultan districts, but especially in Dara-i Suf-e Payin where only in 2 out of 17 polling centres the election was held. However no large-scale attacks were carried out against ANDSF on election day in Samangan.³²⁶⁸

AGEs closed 19 health facilities in Dara-i Suf-e Payin district on 14 October 2019. As a result, nearly 200 000 people were denied access to health, according to UNOCHA.³²⁶⁹ After more than two weeks of continued negotiations the health facilities reopened in the second week of November 2019.³²⁷⁰

2.30.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 3 570 persons displaced due to conflict from Samangan province, mainly from Ruy-e Duab, Aybak and Dara-i Suf-e Payin

³²⁵⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, [url](#)

³²⁶⁰ Ariana News, Taliban Abducted 60 Truck Drivers in Samangan, 11 April 2019, [url](#); Qatar Tribune, Taliban abduct 60 Afghan truck drivers for failing to pay toll, 12 April 2019, [url](#)

³²⁶¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

³²⁶² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³²⁶³ Pajwok Afghan News, 9 detained for allegedly gang-raping midwife in Samangan, 21 May 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 9 arrested for alleged gang-rape of a mid-wife and a nurse in Samangan province, 21 May 2019, [url](#)

³²⁶⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 49

³²⁶⁵ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 49

³²⁶⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Insurgents kidnap district chief in Samangan, 2 February 2020, [url](#); 1TV, Taliban abduct Afghan district governor in Samangan: MoI, 24 February 2020, [url](#); RFE/RL, At Least Six Killed In Afghanistan Despite 'Reduction Of Violence' Deal, 24 February 2020, [url](#)

³²⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, [url](#); AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

³²⁶⁸ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

³²⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (14 October – 20 October 2019), 24 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 October – 27 October 2019), 30 October 2019, [url](#)

³²⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 – 10 November 2019), 13 November 2019, [url](#)

districts. More than 95 % were displaced within the province itself. A few dozen were displaced to Balkh and Kabul provinces.³²⁷¹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 3 444 persons displaced within Samangan province. Samangan/Aybak district hosted all.³²⁷²

³²⁷¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

³²⁷² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

2.31 Sar-e Pul

2.31.1 General description of the province



Map 31: Afghanistan – Sar-e Pul province, source: UNOCHA³²⁷³

³²⁷³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Sar-e Pul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

Sar-e Pul province is located in the north of Afghanistan and has borders with Jawzjan to the north, Balkh to the north-east, Samangan to the east, Bamyan and Ghor to the south and Faryab to the west.³²⁷⁴ The province is divided into the following administrative units: Balkhab, Gosfandi, Kohestanat, Sancharak, Sar-e Pul, Sayad and Sozmaqala.³²⁷⁵ It became province of its own in 1988, when Jawzjan ceded it.³²⁷⁶ The provincial capital is Sar-e Pul.³²⁷⁷

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 621 002, 176 994 of whom live in the provincial capital, Sar-e Pul.³²⁷⁸ The main ethnic group in the province are Uzbeks.³²⁷⁹ Other groups present include Hazaras, Tajiks, Pashtun, Arabs, Aimaq and Balochs.³²⁸⁰

A highway from Shiberghan, Jawzjan province, connects the provincial capital of Sar-e Pul with the Mazar-e Sharif– Herat section of the Ring Road (Highway One).³²⁸¹

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, poppy cultivation in Sar-e Pul province decreased by 81 % in 2018, compared to 2017. The districts with the highest rate of opium-poppy cultivation were Sayad, Sancharak and the Sar-e Pul provincial centre. Moreover, the 2018 drought affected the rain-fed agricultural area.³²⁸²

As reported by Reuters in January 2019, oil wells near Sar-e Pul City are an important source of income for the province, and the Taliban try to either control or destroy them.³²⁸³

2.31.2 Conflict background and actors in Sar-e Pul

Sar-e Pul province is said to have become a ‘Taliban stronghold’ since 2012. The administration as well as military structure of the Taliban network in Sar-e Pul has consisted mainly of non-Pashtun locals, reflecting the multi-ethnic character of the province. The insurgency used to get its fighters from the prevailing ethnic groups in the districts. For instance, in Kohestanat, the movement was mainly led by Aimaq and Tajiks, whereas in Sozmaqala it was mostly controlled by Uzbeks.³²⁸⁴ On 22 April 2020 the Taliban shared a video introducing the Taliban governor of Balkhab district, Mawlawi Mehdi Mujahed, a Shia Hazara.³²⁸⁵ This evoked surprise in some comments on Twitter and in Afghan media reports, that stressed the fact that this was the first time a Shia Hazara Taliban commander was presented.³²⁸⁶ This ethno-religious group is barely represented in the Taliban movement. Looking into the Taliban presence in Balkhab district and Mehdi’s background, Afghanistan analyst Thomas Ruttig considered this was an exceptional case but concluded that with only a small group of fighters under his command and not having a presence in the district, Mehdi’s military relevance was low and his appointment could hardly

³²⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Sar-e Pul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³²⁷⁵ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Sarepul, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 32

³²⁷⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Sar-i-Pul province, n.d., [url](#)

³²⁷⁷ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Sar e Pul, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

³²⁷⁸ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 32

³²⁷⁹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Sar-i-Pul Provincial Review, n.d., [url](#); Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban in the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

³²⁸⁰ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Sar e Pul, 1 February 2017, [url](#); Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban in the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

³²⁸¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Sar-e Pul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, [url](#), p. 5

³²⁸² UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 26

³²⁸³ Reuters, Taliban threaten oil fields in northern Afghanistan, 4 January 2019, [url](#)

³²⁸⁴ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban in the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

³²⁸⁵ Voice of Jihad, *مصاحبه استدیویی الامارة با مسئول ولسوالی بلخاب ولایت سرپل محترم (مولوی مهدی مجاهد) به نشر د جهاد غږ رسيد* [informal translation: Al Emarah Studio has published the interview with Mawlawi Mahdi Mujahid, responsible for Balkhab district of Sar-e Pul province], 22 April 2020, [url](#); Voice of Jihad, Video: Interview with governor of Balkhab – Mawlawi Mahdi Mujahid, 24 April 2020, [url](#)

³²⁸⁶ Nasr, W. (@SimNasr), [Twitter], posted on 22 April 2020, [url](#); Mehsud, I. T. (@IhsanTipu), [Twitter], posted on 22 April 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban appoints first Shia Hazara as shadow district chief of the group, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

change the perception and mistrust among Hazaras of the Taliban. However it showed how switching alliances, even between unexpected sides, could occur as a result of complicated local power balance.³²⁸⁷

As reported by AAN in mid-2018, Taliban militants controlled half of the province, mostly the western and southern parts and some parts of Sayad, Balkhab and Sancharak districts.³²⁸⁸ In 2019 the provincial council chief of Sar-e Pul claimed 60 % of the province was under Taliban control.³²⁸⁹ An Afghanistan analyst contacted by the Swedish Migrations Agency (Migrationsverket) in January 2020, considered Sar-e Pul and Faryab to be the most Taliban-controlled or influenced provinces in the northern region.³²⁹⁰

As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Kohestanat district as 'Taliban-controlled', Balkhab district as 'government-controlled' and the remaining districts in Sar-e Pul province as 'contested'.³²⁹¹

According to AAN, Central Asian militants from the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) have been active in Sar-e Pul province and operating alongside the Taliban since 2015. IJU militants are mainly Uzbeks from Uzbekistan, who have settled in Kohestanat district. Their main activity in the province has consisted of offering military training to new Taliban recruits.³²⁹² AAN found no evidence of the presence of militants affiliated with ISKP in Sar-e Pul province, as claimed by several sources mid-2018, noting that existing reporting and locals may have confused ISKP with the IJU.³²⁹³ No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Sar-e Pul province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.³²⁹⁴

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Sar-e Pul province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps. Sar-e Pul province is included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.³²⁹⁵

2.31.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.31.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 217 civilian casualties (48 deaths and 169 injured) in Sar-e Pul. This represents an increase of 115 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by explosive remnants of war and non-suicide IEDs.³²⁹⁶ Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Sar-e Pul in the first half of 2020, reporting an increase in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.³²⁹⁷

³²⁸⁷ Ruttig, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balkhab District: Are the Taleban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

³²⁸⁸ Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, [url](#); Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban in the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, [url](#)

³²⁸⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces, Taliban suffer casualties in Sar-i-Pul clash, 9 April 2019, [url](#)

³²⁹⁰ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 47

³²⁹¹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

³²⁹² Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

³²⁹³ Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

³²⁹⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³²⁹⁵ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12, p. 50; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

³²⁹⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94. No UNAMA data on civilian casualties in Sar-e Pul province were available for the first half of 2020.

³²⁹⁷ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

ACLED collected data on 142 violent events in Sar-e Pul province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 117 of which were coded as battles, 17 as explosions/remote violence and 8 as violence against civilians.³²⁹⁸ While ACLED registered violent events in all of Sar-e Pul's districts, Sar-e Pul and Sayad stood out as districts where most incidents were reported, with 50 and 31 incidents respectively.³²⁹⁹

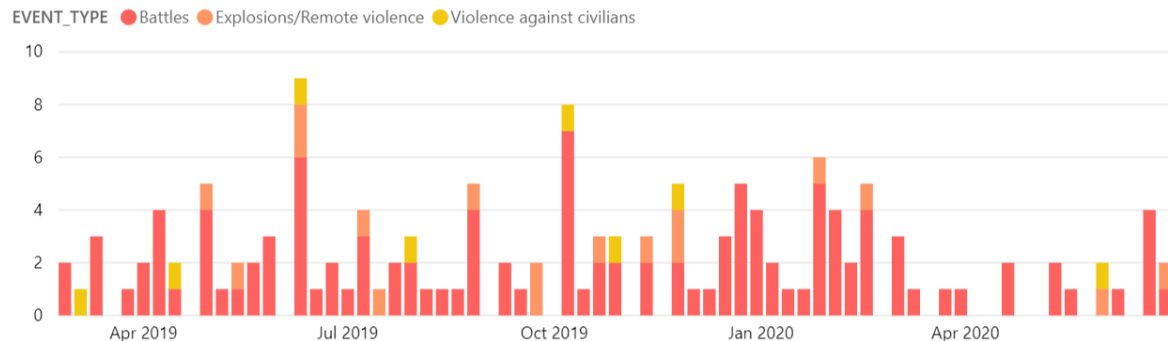


Figure 33. Sar-e Pul Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data³³⁰⁰

ACLED coded 82 % of the violent incidents in Sar-e Pul province as battles, nearly all armed clashes.³³⁰¹ The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS personnel, and members of pro-government militias³³⁰², or government representatives³³⁰³, attacks on their facilities such as checkpoints³³⁰⁴, and military bases³³⁰⁵ and attacks on convoys.³³⁰⁶ At times these incidents resulted in civilian casualties, as for example on 17 February 2020, when the Taliban attacked military bases and houses in Sayad district, killing a child and injuring two other civilians.³³⁰⁷ Relatives of the Sayad district chief were killed in December 2019

³²⁹⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³²⁹⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³³⁰⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Sar-e Pul, [url](#)

³³⁰¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³³⁰² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-July 4, 4 July 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Pro-govt commander shot dead in Sar-i-Pul, 14 July 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 security personnel killed in Taliban ambush, 4 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

³³⁰³ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 killed in attack on district chief residence, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

³³⁰⁴ NYT, 1 August 2019, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 31-June 6, 6 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 5-11, 11 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Policemen among 5 killed in Sar-i-Pul firefight, 14 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban killed, 13 wounded in Sar-i-Pul clashes, 11 May 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Policemen, 3 Taliban killed in Sar-i-Pul clash, 10 October 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Afghan Forces Take Casualties in Sar-e Pul Clash, 21 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

³³⁰⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 5-11, 11 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces, Taliban suffer casualties in Sar-i-Pul clash, 9 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

³³⁰⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 1-7, 7 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 security forces suffer casualties in Sar-i-Pul attack, 2 March 2019, [url](#)

³³⁰⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

as a result of a Taliban attack on his house.³³⁰⁸ Retreating under resistance from the security forces after their attack on security posts, the Taliban looted nearly 100 sheep from residents in Gosfandi district in April 2019, according to a local official cited by local media.³³⁰⁹ Two civilians were killed and another was wounded by crossfire in Gosfandi district in March 2020.³³¹⁰

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, as for example in Sancharak district in October 2019³³¹¹, were also registered under armed clashes. Such operations could result in the displacement of people from their villages, as happened in Tabar and Taghikhwa villages of Sancharak district in March 2019.³³¹²

There were reports of the Taliban capturing villages and localities in Sancharak district in March and April 2019.³³¹³ In December 2019 government forces reportedly managed to regain control over villages in Sar-e Pul district.³³¹⁴

Civilian casualties were reported in a number of the 17 reported incidents of explosions/remote violence in Sar-e Pul province registered by ACLED between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020³³¹⁵, such as incidents of rocket or mortar fire both by Taliban and ANDSF in Sayad and Sar-e Pul districts.³³¹⁶ A premature detonation of a car bomb in Sayad district on 28 November 2019 inflicted injuries on 13 civilians and damage on 10 houses.³³¹⁷ Five children were killed when an unexploded rocket shell went off while they were playing in Sar-e Pul district in July 2019.³³¹⁸ Three civilians were killed and four others when a civilian vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in Sar-e Pul district on 2 June 2020.³³¹⁹

Eight incidents categorised by ACLED as violence against civilians included the killing of civilians by both the Taliban and ANDSF for refusing to follow orders³³²⁰ and the killing of civilians for unknown or unclear reasons.³³²¹ The Taliban also killed an election commission employee³³²² and an incident of

³³⁰⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 killed in attack on district chief residence, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

³³⁰⁹ Khaama Press, Taliban militants loot Gosfandi district in Sar-e Pul province, snatch 100 sheep from local residents, 14 April 2019, [url](#); Ariana News, Taliban Militants Looted 100 Sheep of Villagers in Sar-e Pul, 14 April 2019, [url](#)

³³¹⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

³³¹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 killed, 7 wounded in fresh wave of violence, 7 October 2019, [url](#)

³³¹² Pajhwok Afghan News, Seeking aid, dozens of Sar-i-Pul IDPs rally against govt, 5 March 2019, [url](#)

³³¹³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 12-18, 18 April 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Taliban overrun Gajwae locality in Sar-i-Pul's Sancharak district', 3 March 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Sar-i-Pul: Taliban besiege Sancharak district center, 15 April 2019, [url](#)

³³¹⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³³¹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³³¹⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#)

³³¹⁷ Khaama Press, Premature car bomb explosion damages 10 houses, injures 13 civilians in Sar-e Pul, 28 November 2019, [url](#)

³³¹⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, [url](#); EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Unexploded rocket kills 4 Sar-i-Pul children, 17 July 2019, [url](#)

³³¹⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

³³²⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

³³²¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#); Khaama Press, Couple shot dead by Taliban militants in Sar-e Pul province, 20 April 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Taliban behead a handicapped farmer in Sar-i-Pul', 4 August 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban militants behead a disabled man in Sar-e Pul province, 4 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

³³²² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill poll panel worker in Sar-i-Pul, 8 October 2019, [url](#)

flogging of women in Sancharak district in March 2019 was picked up by the international press.³³²³ In addition to the incidents registered by ACLED the New York Times reported about the killing in February 2020 of three former Taliban members who were living a civilian life in Sar-e Pul district.³³²⁴ Also Afghan news agency Pajhwok reported about the kidnapping and release after a few days of five members of a health care team in Kohestanat district in January 2020.³³²⁵

There were reports from the northern region, which includes Sar-e Pul province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019. Private mobile companies were warned to close down their networks until after the presidential election. By the end of September, early October 2019 all networks started functioning again.³³²⁶ The New York Times reported about 19 Taliban attacks on polling sites across Sar-e Pul province on 28 September 2019, election day.³³²⁷ One child was killed and 20 other civilians were wounded when the Taliban fired a mortar round towards a polling centre. The polling centre had to close.³³²⁸

Security incidents, such as attacks on security checkpoints or on a police vehicle, were reported in Sar-e Pul province, on the highway connecting the province to Jawzjan in March and August 2019 and in January and March 2020.³³²⁹

Within the framework of its attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) did not register such attacks in Sar-e Pul province in 2019.³³³⁰

2.31.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 7 357 persons displaced due to conflict from Sar-e Pul province, 79 % of whom were displaced within the province itself, while others sought refuge in Balkh, Jawzjan and to a lesser extent in Kabul, Faryab and Ghor provinces. Most IDPs were registered as displaced from Sancharak district, followed by Sayad, Sozmaqala and Sar-e Pul districts.³³³¹

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 7 938 persons displaced to Sar-e Pul Sar-e Pul province. Sar-e Pul district hosted all. Almost three out of four were displaced within the province. In April 2019 and January 2020 Sar-e Pul province also hosted IDPs from Faryab and Jawzjan.³³³²

³³²³ The Guardian, 'I lost consciousness': woman whipped by the Taliban over burqa without veil, 18 April 2019, [url](#)

³³²⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

³³²⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Sar-i-Pul province, 16 January 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Around 58,000 Sar-i-Pul children to miss polio drops, 27 January 2020, [url](#)

³³²⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, [url](#)

³³²⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

³³²⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 71

³³²⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 8-14, 14 March 2019, [url](#); Afghan Islamic Press, [Twitter], posted on: 6 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

³³³⁰ WHO, Afghanistan. Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019 [url](#)

³³³¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

³³³² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

2.32 Takhar

2.32.1 General description of the province



Map 32: Afghanistan – Takhar province, source: UNOCHA³³³³

³³³³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

Takhar province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Badkhashan to the east, Panjshir and Baghlan to the south and south-west and Kunduz to the west and an international border with Tajikistan to the north.³³³⁴ Takhar province is divided into the following administrative units: Baharak, Bangi, Chahab, Chal, Darqad, Dasht-e-Qala, Eshkamesh, Farkhar, Hazar Sumuch, Kalafgan, Khwajabahawuddin (Khwaja Bahawuddin), Khwajaghar (also Khwaja Ghar), Namakab, Rostaq, Taloqan, Warsaj and Yangi Qala.³³³⁵ The provincial capital is Taloqan.³³³⁶

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1 093 092, 258 724 of whom live in the provincial capital, Taloqan.³³³⁷ The main ethnic group in the province are Uzbeks and Tajiks.³³³⁸ Other groups present include Pashtuns³³³⁹, Hazaras³³⁴⁰ and Arabs³³⁴¹.

The Kunduz-Takhar Highway runs through the districts of Kalafgan, Taloqan and Bangi.³³⁴²

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Takhar was poppy-free from 2008 until 2017. In 2018 the province lost its poppy-free status, as 251 hectares of opium poppy were cultivated in Rostaq, Kalafgan and Farkhar districts.³³⁴³ Drug smuggling routes leading into Central Asia run through some districts of Takhar province.³³⁴⁴

2.32.2 Conflict background and actors in Takhar

In 2017, AAN reported that the Taliban had been unable to ‘establish a stronger foothold’ in Takhar, despite some territorial gains starting in 2014, which prevented them from ‘connecting their fronts in [...] the west and south-west on the one hand, and [...] the east on the other’.³³⁴⁵ In May 2019, journalist Bilal Sarwary noted an increased Taliban presence in Takhar province.³³⁴⁶ According to Afghanistan analysts Obaid Ali and Thomas Ruttig their presence had grown in most parts of Takhar over the past few years and several offensives in the province in 2019 enabled them to expand their control towards Taloqan City³³⁴⁷, raising concern among the local people.³³⁴⁸

Reporting on the presidential elections of 28 September 2019, AAN described Khwajabahawuddin, Khwajaghar, Yangi Qala and Dasht-e Qala districts as ‘heavily contested’.³³⁴⁹ According to a November 2019 assessment by AAN, following six districts were under government control: Rostaq, Farkhar, Warsaj, Kalafgan, Hazar Sumuch and Chal. The remaining districts were either ‘heavily contested or largely under Taleban control, or the government was only visible in the district centre and immediate vicinity’.³³⁵⁰ As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated

³³³⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³³³⁵ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Takhar, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 28

³³³⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., [url](#)

³³³⁷ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 28

³³³⁸ Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

³³³⁹ Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

³³⁴⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Takhar Provincial Review, n.d., [url](#)

³³⁴¹ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Takhar, 1 February 2017, [url](#)

³³⁴² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url](#)

³³⁴³ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 27

³³⁴⁴ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#); RFE/RL, In The Dark: Tajik Border Residents Live Not Knowing What Lies Beyond, 22 November 2018, [url](#); Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

³³⁴⁵ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

³³⁴⁶ Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 22 May 2019, [url](#)

³³⁴⁷ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

³³⁴⁸ Afghanistan Times, Rampant insecurity stymies peace in Takhar, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

³³⁴⁹ AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (13): Observations from Kandahar, Takhar, Wardak and Balkh, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

³³⁵⁰ Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

map and based on open-source information, indicated Baharak, Chahab, Khwajaghar and Yangi Qala districts as ‘Taliban-controlled’, Bagi, Darqad, Dasht-e Qala, Eshkamesh, Khwajabahawuddin and Taloqan districts as ‘contested’ and the remaining districts in Takhar province as ‘government-controlled’.³³⁵¹

Besides the Taliban, militants from ISKP, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), drug runners and criminals were reportedly active along the Tajik border in 2018³³⁵², as well as members of the terrorist movement Jundullah, a splinter group of IMU, mainly composed of non-Pashtun³³⁵³ Afghans.³³⁵⁴ According to a February 2019 AAN report, Jundullah’s military wing, Jabha-ye Qariha, was operating in some northern districts of Takhar province.³³⁵⁵ Purportedly, a small number of Islamic Jihad Union fighters, a movement mainly composed of Uzbeks from Uzbekistan, were active in parts of the province in 2018. These fighters were part of an independent front called Imom Buxoriy Katiba (Imam Bukhari’s Battalion), operating in northern and north-eastern Afghanistan.³³⁵⁶ According to information submitted to the UN Security Council for its June 2019 report, in Afghanistan Central Asian groups are under the direct operational and financial control of the Taliban, with about 50 fighters of the Islamic Jihad Group in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces.³³⁵⁷

Taliban fighters started to emerge in 2010 in Darqad, a Pashtun dominated district, coming from Kunduz with a mix of Takharis and outsiders in their ranks.³³⁵⁸ Militants affiliated to IMU, Jundullah and the Taliban fought alongside each other against the Afghan security forces until the end of 2014. In mid-2015, the IMU allied with the IS. Consequently, the already precarious relations between the Pashtun and the non-Pashtun AGEs worsened and the Taliban ordered the disarmament and even the killing of some Uzbek Jundullah fighters in order to prevent them from allying with the IS, as IMU did.³³⁵⁹

Throughout the years the Taliban appointed more local Uzbek and Tajik commanders to key positions in order to broaden their base in the ‘largely non-Pashtun’ province and to prevent it from becoming an IS stronghold.³³⁶⁰ This policy was interrupted with the replacement of the former Uzbek shadow governor of the province by a Pashtun, which led to a further deterioration of the relations between the two ethnic groups. Although the situation improved after an Uzbek, the former Taliban commander Mawlawi Nurullah, was appointed as the new shadow governor of Takhar in 2017, AGEs affiliated with IMU and Jundullah continued to fight autonomously from the Taliban. Although the three groups share the same religious views, as they all follow the Hanafi school of law, the IMU and Jundullah ignore local culture, such as the role of elders in conflict resolution and in other important issues.³³⁶¹

While a researcher for the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) mentioned small pockets of ISKP emerging in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces in August 2019³³⁶², no security incidents specifically

³³⁵¹ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#). The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

³³⁵² RFE/RL, In The Dark: Tajik Border Residents Live Not Knowing What Lies Beyond, 22 November 2018, [url](#)

³³⁵³ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

³³⁵⁴ Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat’s IS-affiliated ‘island’ survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018, [url](#)

³³⁵⁵ Ali, O., One Land, Two Rules (3): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Dasht-e Archi district in Kunduz province, AAN, 26 February 2019, [url](#)

³³⁵⁶ Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

³³⁵⁷ UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url](#), p. 18

³³⁵⁸ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#); Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

³³⁵⁹ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

³³⁶⁰ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#); Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

³³⁶¹ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, [url](#)

³³⁶² National (The), ISIS recruitment is growing in Afghanistan as US and Taliban work for peace, 8 August 2019, [url](#)

attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Takhar province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.³³⁶³

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Takhar province is under the responsibility of the 217th ANA corps after ANA's 20th Division, previously under the ANA 209th Corps, was reassigned in April 2019 to become a new corps, the 217th Corps.³³⁶⁴ The 217th Corps has its headquarters in Kunduz.³³⁶⁵ As of 30 April 2020, Takhar province was still included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC-North), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.³³⁶⁶

According to Afghanistan analyst Kate Clark in November 2019, the ANA Territorial Force was established in Taloqan City and was also planned for Khwajabahawuddin district.³³⁶⁷

ALP, local uprising forces and pro-government militias are present and active in some of Takhar's districts.³³⁶⁸ The Takhar ALP is cited among the worst of the ALP units, due to the power of local strongmen over it and the involvement of some of its units in drug smuggling or abuses of the local population. Replacing all ALP commanders earlier in 2019 in Takhar seemed not to have brought actual changes. Like the ALP, local uprising forces are said to be controlled and mobilised by local strongmen. Afghanistan analyst Kate Clark describes Takhar as a province where 'the commander class that emerged during Afghanistan's long years of war is particularly strong'. Experts interviewed by Kate Clark mentioned deep historical grievances and conflict between several commanders in Takhar. While they can cooperate in case of a big external threat, they start fighting each other again once that threat is gone, in turn presenting a threat to the local people themselves and making Takhar a vulnerable province to the Taliban.³³⁶⁹

In December 2019 residents and civil society activists from Takhar expressed concern about increasing crime in the province, attributing it to a rise in the number of illegal gunmen and unemployment.³³⁷⁰

2.32.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.32.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 192 civilian casualties (60 deaths and 132 injured) in Takhar. This represents an increase of 70 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements followed by air strikes and non-suicide IEDs.³³⁷¹ Resolute Support recorded between 77 and 125 civilian casualties in Takhar in the first half of 2020, reporting an increase in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.³³⁷²

³³⁶³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Takhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³³⁶⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2019, [url](#), p. 78

³³⁶⁵ USDOD, Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Lead Inspector General Report To The United States Congress. April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019, 16 August 2019, [url](#), p. 5

³³⁶⁶ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12; 50; USDOD, Operation Freedom's Sentinel. Lead Inspector General Report To The United States Congress. April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019, 16 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 27-28; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

³³⁶⁷ Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

³³⁶⁸ Khaama Press, Taliban's ambush in Takhar kills 20 members of public uprising forces, 29 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 pro-government militiamen killed in Takhar assault, 29 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Takhar: 2 uprising members killed in Taliban attack, 15 January 2020, [url](#)

³³⁶⁹ Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, [url](#)

³³⁷⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, In Takhar, rising crime graph sparks concerns, 2 December 2019, [url](#)

³³⁷¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94. No UNAMA data on civilian casualties in Takhar province were available for the first half of 2020.

³³⁷² SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 72

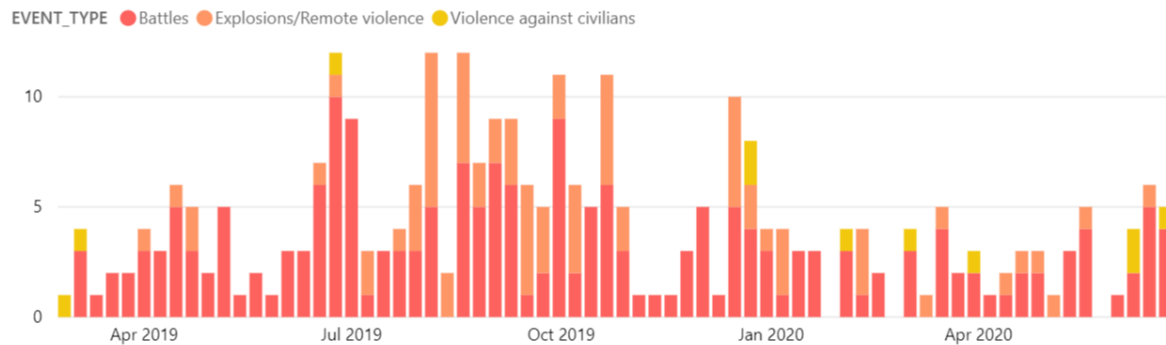


Figure 34. Takhar - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data³³⁷³

ACLED collected data on 292 violent events in Takhar province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 205 of which were coded as battles, 76 as explosions/remote violence and 11 as violence against civilians. Two out of three incidents occurred in following five districts: Eshkamesh, Baharak, Darqad, Dasht-e Qala and Khwajaghar. No violent events were registered by ACLED in Hazar Sumuch and Warsaj districts.³³⁷⁴

ACLED coded 70 % of the violent events in Takhar province as battles, mainly armed clashes.³³⁷⁵ The majority of those armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police, military or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or so-called Arbakis (the term 'Arbaki' is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias)³³⁷⁶, or attacks on military or police facilities such as checkpoints³³⁷⁷, bases³³⁷⁸ and headquarters³³⁷⁹ and on vehicles³³⁸⁰ and convoys.³³⁸¹ Some of those incidents resulted in civilian casualties, such as clashes between Taliban and government forces in Khwajaghar district in April 2019, in Eshkamesh district in June 2019 or in Dasht-e Qala district in February 2020.³³⁸² One civilian was killed in a Taliban attack on the residence of the Khwajaghar district police chief on

³³⁷³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Takhar, [url](#)

³³⁷⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Takhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³³⁷⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Takhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³³⁷⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

³³⁷⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 5-11, 11 April 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 15 policemen killed, 13 injured in Taliban attack, 25 July 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 ALP personnel killed, 7 wounded in Takhar attack, 16 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

³³⁷⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

³³⁷⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 12-18, 18 April 2019, [url](#)

³³⁸⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-july 4, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

³³⁸¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 19-25, 25 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

³³⁸² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 19-25, 25 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 14-20, 20 June 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

30 March 2020.³³⁸³ Fighting destroyed the houses of four families in Baharak district in May 2020.³³⁸⁴ At least one civilian was killed during clashes following a Taliban attack in Chahab district in late June 2020.³³⁸⁵

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, as for example in Dasht-e Qala in April 2019³³⁸⁶, were also registered under armed clashes. With the approval of the Ministry of Defence's Operation Khalid on 2 April 2019, Takhar was one of the provinces in the north-east that security forces' operations focused on.³³⁸⁷ Several of the security operations were backed by air strikes.³³⁸⁸

Clashes between pro-government militias in Kalafgan district in March 2019 and in Chahab district in August 2019 also caused civilian casualties.³³⁸⁹

In the reporting period the Taliban carried out several attacks on parts of various districts in Takhar province, such as an attack on Taloqan City in July 2019³³⁹⁰ and on Khwajaghar district centre in June and September 2019³³⁹¹, prompting residents and civil society activists from Takhar to gather in Kabul in early October 2019, to express concern that Taloqan might fall to the Taliban, while officials denied this threat.³³⁹² Control over Yangi Qala and Darqad districts has been changing hands between the Taliban and the government in the reporting period.³³⁹³ The Taliban attacked Darqad district centre in November 2019³³⁹⁴ and April 2020³³⁹⁵, took over Chahab district centre for a few hours on 30 August 2019³³⁹⁶ and attacked a village in Baharak district in January 2020.³³⁹⁷

Air/drone strikes represented 21 % of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Takhar province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.³³⁹⁸ Most were carried out in Eshkamesh district, followed by Darqad district. The majority of air strikes were carried out by Afghan forces, some were attributed

³³⁸³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban raid leaves 14 security forces dead in Takhar, 30 March 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Attacks in Takhar, Zabul Kill 19 ANDSF, 30 March 2020, [url](#)

³³⁸⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 May – 10 May 2020), 13 May 2020, [url](#)

³³⁸⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#); Afghan Islamic Press (@aip_news), [Twitter], posted on: 24 June 2020, [url](#)

³³⁸⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 28 Taliban rebels killed in Takhar operation, 24 April 2019, [url](#)

³³⁸⁷ UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/902–S/2019/493 14 June 2019, [url](#), p. 5

³³⁸⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Takhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#); Khaama Press, 6 Taliban militants killed in Special Forces raid, airstrike in Takhar province, 6 July 2019, [url](#)

³³⁸⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 22-28, 29 March 2019, [url](#)

³³⁹⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-july 4, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

³³⁹¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban lose 15 fighters in battle for Khwaja Ghar district, 12 June 2019, [url](#);

Tolonews, Heavy Clashes Ongoing In Takhar's Khwaja Ghar District, 9 September 2019, [url](#)

³³⁹² Tolonews, Residents Take Protest To Kabul As Takhar Security Deteriorates, 3 October 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Residents worried as clashes approach Taloqan, 3 October 2019, [url](#)

³³⁹³ Ruttig, T., Van Bijlert, M., et. al., Afghanistan's 2019 Election (10): What to watch out for on election day, AAN, 26 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 10 September 2019, [url](#); Gandhara (RFE/RL), Taliban Capture Key Afghan Districts Bordering Central Asia, 10 September 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Afghan forces fully clear 2 districts of Taliban militants in Farah and Takhar, 13 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan forces retake Darqad district, Taliban refute, 25 October 2019, [url](#)

³³⁹⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#)

³³⁹⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#)

³³⁹⁶ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban storm Cha Ab district in Takhar, 30 August 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 21 security personnel killed in Takhar attacks, 30 August 2019, [url](#)

³³⁹⁷ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

³³⁹⁸ These do not include air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under 'battles'. For more information on ACLED's methodology, please consult the introduction.

to NATO forces.³³⁹⁹ While those air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs³⁴⁰⁰, some also caused civilian casualties, for example in Yangi Qala district on 18 September 2019³⁴⁰¹ or in Eshkamesh district on 23 December 2019.³⁴⁰²

The remaining incidents of explosions/remote violence registered by ACLED included incidents where the Taliban or unidentified armed groups used roadside bombs and IEDs or rockets and shelling to target security forces or government officials.³⁴⁰³ Some of these incidents caused civilian casualties as for example in Darqad district on 5 September 2019 when shelling by the Taliban killed two civilians, and injured two, on 2 November 2019 when school children were killed and wounded after stepping on a road side bomb³⁴⁰⁴ or on 12 January 2020 when a rocket fired by the Taliban hit a house, killing one child and injuring two.³⁴⁰⁵ Seven civilians were injured when a bomb exploded in a hotel in Eshkamesh district in October 2019.³⁴⁰⁶ A Taliban roadside bomb exploded prematurely in Taloqan on 20 March 2020, killing not only four of their own members, but also two children.³⁴⁰⁷ At least nine students were killed, as a result of a bomb explosion inside a religious school in Eshkamesh district in June 2020.³⁴⁰⁸

Eleven incidents categorised by ACLED as violence against civilians included the killing of civilians by Afghan security forces, as for example in in Dasht-e Qala district in June 2019³⁴⁰⁹ or the killing of civilians in Darqad district by the Tajikistan border police on 25 December 2019.³⁴¹⁰ The killing of a doctor in Rostaq district in March 2019 was attributed to unidentified armed men. The Taliban killed civilians during an attack on Yangi Qala bazaar.³⁴¹¹ They also killed a civilian working as a cook on a military base in Dasht-e Qala district in March 2020³⁴¹² and kidnapped and beheaded a tribal elder in Taloqan City in April 2020.³⁴¹³ Unknown armed men killed an imam and the Taliban kidnapped and killed a former jihadi commander in Chahab district in June 2020.³⁴¹⁴

There were reports from the north-eastern region, including from Takhar province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in

³³⁹⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Takhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁴⁰⁰ Khaama Press, Airstrikes kill more than 40 Taliban militants in Takhar and Kunduz provinces, 11 September 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Precision airstrike kills deputy commander of the Red Unit of Taliban in Takhar, 15 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁰¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁰² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁰³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Takhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁰⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Nine children killed in Afghanistan landmine blast, 2 November 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 schoolchildren dead in Takhar explosion, 2 November 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (October 2019), 23 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁰⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁰⁶ Bakhtar News, Mine Blast Wounds Seven Civilians in Takhar, 23 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁰⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 children among 6 killed in Taloqan bombing, 20 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Takhar seminary blast leaves 10 students dead, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁰⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-july 4, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁴¹⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Takhar residents shot dead by Tajik border guards, 26 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁴¹¹ Xinhua, Over 40 including 3 civilians killed within one day in Afghan fighting, 4 March 2019, [url](#)

³⁴¹² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁴¹³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban behead influential elder in Takhar, 4 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁴¹⁴ RFE/RL (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty), At Least 17 Killed In Attacks Across Afghanistan, 13 June 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Takhar: Imam shot dead by unidentified gunmen, 13 June 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, [url](#)

September 2019.³⁴¹⁵ Following through on an earlier warning, the Taliban destroyed towers of cell phone companies in Takhar province.³⁴¹⁶ Cell phone networks and internet were largely not functioning between 27 September and 2 October 2019.³⁴¹⁷ Several attacks by the Taliban were reported in various parts of Takhar province on 28 September 2019, the day of the presidential election.³⁴¹⁸ The head of the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA) told Pajhwok that five of their agents were held hostage during a Taliban attack in Chahab district on election day.³⁴¹⁹

There were reports of security incidents and occasional closures due to clashes on the Kunduz-Takhar Highway road in the reporting period. At times the Taliban blocked the highway to obstruct security reinforcements, but preventing the movement of civilians at the same time.³⁴²⁰ In June 2019 the Taliban destroyed a bridge connecting several of Takhar's districts with provincial capital Taloqan. As a result all routes from 20 villages to Taloqan City were blocked, impacting access to food and hospitals.³⁴²¹ In order to prevent the security forces from tracking them, the Taliban destroyed several other bridges in or around Taloqan in April 2020, again cutting off hundreds of families from the capital.³⁴²² Sources told AAN that in the aftermath of the 31 August 2019 attack on Kunduz the Taliban continued to set up mobile checkpoints on the Kunduz-Takhar Highway.³⁴²³ In two separate incidents on that same highway five people were reportedly abducted and a woman was killed at illegal checkpoints in April 2020.³⁴²⁴ The Taliban reportedly set up checkpoints on the Takhar-Baghlan Highway in February 2020.³⁴²⁵

On 16 March 2019 clashes broke out between Afghan police and soldiers inside a health facility in Darqad district.³⁴²⁶ Sources reported about the closure of several health facilities by the Taliban, including in Darqad, Khwajabahawuddin, Khwajaghar, Baharak, Rostaq and Cha-ab districts in March 2020, depriving people of health services.³⁴²⁷ The Taliban ascribe the closure to non-availability of facilities and corruption.³⁴²⁸ At the time of writing, no updated information regarding the closure or reopening of those facilities was available. Fighting between the Taliban and ANDSF nearby, inflicted/caused damage to a local hospital in Dasht-e Qala district on 24 March 2020.³⁴²⁹

On 3 February 2020 the Taliban reportedly set fire to the Bodala Girls School in Taloqan City.³⁴³⁰

³⁴¹⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, [url](#); Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 10; NYT, To Disrupt Elections, Taliban Turn to an Old Tactic: Destroying Cell Towers, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁴¹⁶ NYT, To Disrupt Elections, Taliban Turn to an Old Tactic: Destroying Cell Towers, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁴¹⁷ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (13): Observations from Kandahar, Takhar, Wardak and Balkh, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁴¹⁸ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Afghan Forces Repulse Taliban Attack In Taluqan, Takhar, 30 September 2019, [url](#); AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (13): Observations from Kandahar, Takhar, Wardak and Balkh, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁴¹⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 observers killed, many beaten on polling day, 17 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁴²⁰ Xinhua, Roundup: 20 killed in Afghanistan within 24 hours amid violence reduction in Afghanistan, 3 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](#); Afghan Islamic Press, [Twitter], posted on: 3 March 2019, [url](#); Afghan Islamic Press, [Twitter], posted on: 3 March 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 December – 22 December 2019), 26 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁴²¹ Salaam Times, Taliban's destruction of key bridge cuts off 20 villages in Takhar Province, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁴²² Salaam Times, Taliban blow up bridge in Takhar, cutting off thousands of villagers, 29 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁴²³ Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁴²⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 April – 20 April 2020), 22 April 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 April – 26 April 2020), 29 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁴²⁵ Tolonews, 2 Confirmed Attacks on Afghan Forces on Second Day of RIV, 23 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁴²⁶ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 15-21, 22 March 2019, [url](#)

³⁴²⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (24 February – 1 March 2020), 4 March 2020, [url](#); Xinhua, Afghan militants shut down health clinics in northern Takhar province: Official, 7 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁴²⁸ Afghan Islamic Press (@aip_news), [Twitter], posted on 9 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁴²⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, [url](#), p. 7

³⁴³⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban set fire to girls' school in Takhar: Rahimi, 3 February 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Girls school set on fire in the northern Takhar, 3 February 2020, [url](#); Salaam Times, Taliban blow up bridge in Takhar, cutting off thousands of villagers, 29 April 2020, [url](#)

In its report covering 2019 UNAMA noted that in certain parts of Afghanistan, including Takhar, several private telecommunications companies, with the exception of Salaam Telecommunications, shut down their services in the evening following up on orders issued by the Taliban in order to prevent being tracked down or targeted during operations.³⁴³¹ According to a Twitter post by journalist Bilal Sarwary in May 2019 the Taliban asked major mobile service provider companies to stop services in Taloqan City.³⁴³² A short break during the week of reduction in violence at the end of February 2020 aside, all telecom operators, except for the Salaam Telecom, had to shut down services between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. in Takhar, because of Taliban threats and intimidation. This impacted online education and access to health facilities in times of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.³⁴³³

Electricity pylons providing power from Tajikistan to Takhar province were destroyed on 23 September 2019 due to clashes between the Taliban and security forces. As a result Takhar province had no electricity for about a week.³⁴³⁴

Within the framework of the attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) did not register such attacks in Takhar province in 2019.³⁴³⁵ UNAMA documented the abduction by the Taliban of three healthcare workers in Khwajaghar district between March and May 2020. The organisation they worked for was accused of failing to pay the salaries to their employees.³⁴³⁶ Also a mortar round fired during fighting between the Taliban and Afghan forces, caused damage to a hospital in Dasht-e Qala district on 24 March 2020.³⁴³⁷

2.32.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA reported regularly about continued clashes between AGEs and the ANDSF in Takhar causing displacement in the reporting period.³⁴³⁸

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 85 127 persons displaced by conflict from Takhar province, 96 % of whom were displaced within the province itself, while others sought refuge in Kunduz province and to a lesser extent in Kabul and Kapisa provinces. It makes Takhar the province where conflict caused the largest displacement in the reporting period.³⁴³⁹ More than half of all reported IDPs from Takhar were displaced from Baharak district, in particular in June 2019 when Afghan security forces stepped up their operations in Takhar, often with air support³⁴⁴⁰ and in September 2019, due to clashes.³⁴⁴¹ The second largest group of IDPs was displaced from Eshkamesh district, mainly in June and August 2019, due to heavy clashes and operations in the

³⁴³¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), pp. 109-110; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban continue telecom services shutdown in Baghlan, 14 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁴³² Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on 22 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁴³³ Salaam Times, Taliban resume telecom restrictions in Takhar, hindering coronavirus response, 22 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁴³⁴ AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (13): Observations from Kandahar, Takhar, Wardak and Balkh, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁴³⁵ WHO, Afghanistan. Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019 [url](#)

³⁴³⁶ UNAMA, Special Report: Attacks On Healthcare During The Covid-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 9; 20

³⁴³⁷ UNAMA, Special Report: Attacks On Healthcare During The Covid-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

³⁴³⁸ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (9 - 15 September 2019), 18 September 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 October – 13 October 2019), 16 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 April – 12 April 2020), 16 April 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (11 May – 17 May 2020), 20 May 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (25 May – 31 May 2020), 3 June 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 - 29 September 2019), 2 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 September – 6 October 2019), 9 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 - 25 August 2019), 27 August 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (8 June – 14 June 2020), 17 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁴³⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 14 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁴⁰ Khaama Press, Special Forces fully clear Baharak district of Takhar from the presence of Taliban militants, 6 July 2019, [url](#); Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url](#)

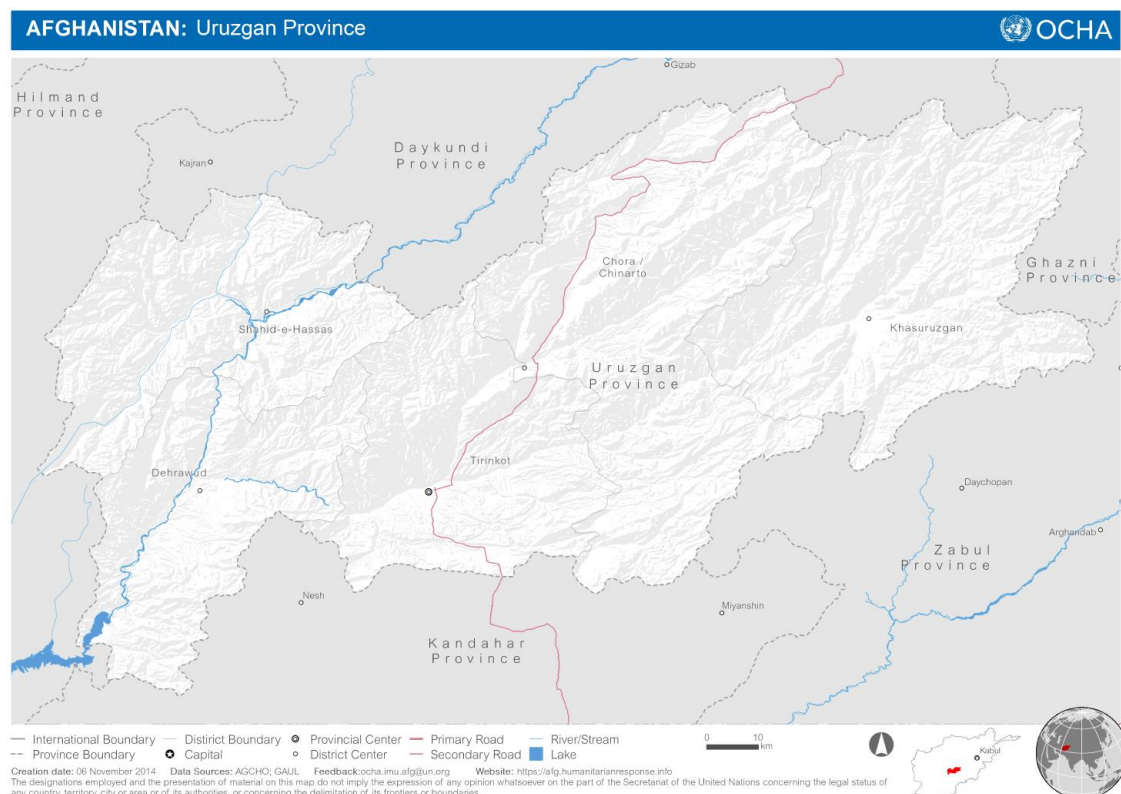
³⁴⁴¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 - 29 September 2019), 2 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 September – 6 October 2019), 9 October 2019, [url](#)

district.³⁴⁴² Most were displaced to Taloqan, but many also within the district or to Kunduz province.³⁴⁴³ Conflict also caused the displacement of over 5 000 residents of Namakab and Darqad districts.³⁴⁴⁴ Of all IDPs registered by UNOCHA from Takhar province in the reporting period, most were registered in the second half of 2019. So far in 2020, May was the only month in which UNOCHA registered IDPs from Takhar. However in the last days of June 2020 UNOCHA noted the ‘most significant displacement since March 2020’ in three north-eastern provinces, including Takhar.³⁴⁴⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 84 112 persons displaced by conflict to Takhar province, nearly all from within the province and nearly all seeking refuge in Taloqan and Farkhar districts. In November and December 2019 Taloqan also hosted IDPs from Guzargah-e-Nur district in Baghlan.³⁴⁴⁶

2.33 Uruzgan

2.33.1 General description of the province



Map 33: Afghanistan – Uruzgan province, source: UNOCHA³⁴⁴⁷

³⁴⁴² Tolonews, Takhar Needs Reinforcements To Push Back Taliban: Officials, 3 August 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (29 July - 04 August 2019), 7 August 2019, [url](#); UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/990-S/2019/703, 3 September 2019, [url](#), p. 11; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 - 11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 - 25 August 2019), 27 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁴³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 14 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁴⁴ ERM, Household Assessment report, 21 June 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 October – 13 October 2019), 16 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (9 - 15 September 2019), 18 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁴⁵ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 June – 28 June 2020), 1 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁴⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 14 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Uruzgan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

Uruzgan province is located in the central part of Afghanistan and is also known by the name ‘Rozgan’ or ‘Uruzganis’.³⁴⁴⁸ Uruzgan borders on Daykundi in the north, Ghazni in the east, Zabul and Kandahar in the south and Helmand in the west. Uruzgan is divided into the following administrative units: Tirinkot with the provincial capital Tirinkot City (also known as Tarinkot), Dehraoud, Chora (also Chinarto), Shahidhassas (also Shahid-e Hassas, Charchino), Khasuruzgan (also Khas Uruzgan) and Tirinkot.³⁴⁴⁹ The district of Gizab, which was formerly part of Daykundi province, now falls within the administration of Uruzgan.³⁴⁵⁰ Chinarto and Surab are two new districts of the province; their status has not been officially recognised yet.³⁴⁵¹ According to NSIA, the population of Uruzgan is estimated at 436 079 for 2020/21. Urban population, living in provincial capital Tirinkot and two other small towns Dehraoud and Gizab, constitutes less than 4 % of all inhabitants.³⁴⁵² Nearly all population of the province is agrarian and Uruzgan is one of the least developed provinces in terms of education, health facilities and infrastructure.³⁴⁵³

The Kandahar-Uruzgan Highway runs through the districts of Chora and Tirinkot.³⁴⁵⁴ Taliban militants purportedly set up check-points along the highway and they searched or abducted travellers.³⁴⁵⁵ Moreover, passengers complained about the ‘shabby condition’ of the road, which extended the travel time and had a negative impact on vehicles and security.³⁴⁵⁶ Military operations were ongoing in February 2019, in order to clear the road from Taliban insurgents.³⁴⁵⁷ The city of Tirinkot hosts an airport, which was served by domestic scheduled passenger flights as of March 2019.³⁴⁵⁸

According to the UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Uruzgan province decreased by 38 % in 2019, compared to 2018.³⁴⁵⁹ According to the Jordanian news website Al Bawaba, any dwellers relied economically on poppy cultivation and the number of addicts, including women and children, reached up to 15 000.³⁴⁶⁰

2.33.2 Conflict background and actors in Uruzgan

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Uruzgan province is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps, which falls under Train Advise Assist Command-South (TAAC-S), led by US forces.³⁴⁶¹ The ANA soldiers are usually originated from the other provinces and they do not usually leave military bases. In practice, their main task is not to defend local people but not to surrender the base or checkpoint to Taliban. The responsibility to protect the locals against the AGEs was put mainly on police forces, ANP and especially on ALP.³⁴⁶²

At the same time, army and police checkpoints, bases, and office buildings which represent the only government’s presence and control in the countryside, are the main target of repeated Taliban attacks.

³⁴⁴⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Brief introduction of Uruzgan province, n.d., [url](#)

³⁴⁴⁹ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, [url](#), p. 35

³⁴⁵⁰ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN , Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 6

³⁴⁵¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Uruzgan administrative units, n.d., [url](#)

³⁴⁵² Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, [url](#), p. 35

³⁴⁵³ Pajhwok Afghan News, Brief introduction of Uruzgan province, n.d., [url](#)

³⁴⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Uruzgan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Tolonews, Taliban Abducts 19 Bus Passengers and Police On Uruzgan Highway, 28 February 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Dilapidated Kandahar road gives passengers bumpy ride, 14 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁵⁵ Tolonews, Taliban Abducts 19 Bus Passengers and Police On Uruzgan Highway, 28 February 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Dilapidated Kandahar road gives passengers bumpy ride, 14 November 2018, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Lecturer among 5 passengers killed on Uruzgan-Kandahar highway, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁵⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Dilapidated Kandahar road gives passengers bumpy ride, 14 November 2018, [url](#);

³⁴⁵⁷ Khaama Press, Militants suffer heavy casualties in ANDSF operations in Kandahar and Zabul, 7 February 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁵⁸ Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

³⁴⁵⁹ Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁶⁰ Al Bawaba, In Uruzgan, Afghan Mothers Feed Their Children Opium to Make Them Sleep, 2 November 2017, [url](#)

³⁴⁶¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

³⁴⁶² The Canaberra Times, Lessons to be learnt from failures in Uruzgan 26 June 2019, [url](#)

Soldiers have to protect military bases, sometimes without any outside reinforcement. The only effective option for maintaining the military posts, are air strikes.³⁴⁶³

According to local people, the central government appoints top provincial officials without consulting the locals. The top officials take the decision without any coordination and they are often busy with internal infightings. The corruption is widespread among police chiefs in the region. In one case, a former police chief was accused of stealing 58 000 litres of oil during four months which should have been used for police transport and generators.³⁴⁶⁴ In January 2020, provincial police chief was dismissed for the extortion of bribes from his subordinates and for stealing money intended for employees' remuneration.³⁴⁶⁵

Uruzgan was one of the first provinces affected by Taliban resurgence after 2001.³⁴⁶⁶ According to LWJ, only one Uruzgan district, Chora, is fully controlled by Taliban, others are contested.³⁴⁶⁷ In practice, the central authority is limited to the provincial capital, Tirinkot and AGEs took initiatives in the rest of the province.³⁴⁶⁸ The central administration is not present in most district centres and towns and people felt let alone with no choice but to cooperate with Taliban.³⁴⁶⁹ The government administration has been evacuated to other place at least in two districts, according to Tolonews Survey.³⁴⁷⁰ However, in some districts of the province, like Khas Uruzgan, Hazara communities used to live in self-governed enclaves under local agreements with the Taliban, which so far have ensured them the stability.³⁴⁷¹

According to Pajhwok Afghan News, ISKP has been active in the province, particularly in Chora district, recruiting new supporters, even among women. Purportedly, ISKP fighters in the province have been former Taliban militants.³⁴⁷²

2.33.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.33.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 145 civilian casualties (73 deaths and 72 injured) in Uruzgan province. This represents a decrease of 16 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by air strikes and non-suicide IEDs.³⁴⁷³ Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Uruzgan in the first quarter of 2020, reporting an increase in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of the year, with 26-50 casualties recorded (from 1 April to 30 June 2020).³⁴⁷⁴

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported total 642 incidents related to security in Uruzgan province, of which 435 battles, 199 remote violence, 8 cases of violence against civilians.³⁴⁷⁵

³⁴⁶³ RFE/RL/Gandhara, In Remote Afghan Corner, Besieged Afghan Troops Cry For Help 06 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁶⁴ Arab News, Afghans turn to Taliban in forgotten province, 09 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁶⁵ Pajhwok, Uruzgan police chief sacked, summoned to Kabul, 17 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁶⁶ Bijlert M., The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan, ed. Bergen P., Tiedemann K., Talibanistan: Negotiating the Borders Between Terror, Politics, and Religion, Oxford University Press, 2013, [url](#)

³⁴⁶⁷ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

³⁴⁶⁸ The Canaberra Times, Lessons to be learnt from failures in Uruzgan 26 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁶⁹ Arab News, Afghans turn to Taliban in forgotten province, 09 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁷⁰ Tolonews, 64 Administrative Units Partially Paralyzed In 19 Provinces, 01 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁷¹ Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (I): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 28 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁷² Pajhwok Afghan News, Uruzgan: 3 women from Chora district join Daesh, 18 April 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁷³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

³⁴⁷⁴ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

³⁴⁷⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

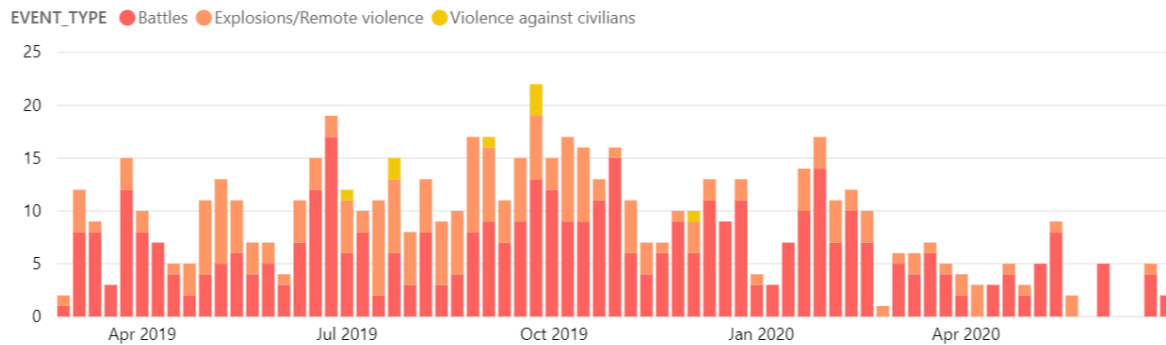


Figure 35. Uruzgan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data³⁴⁷⁶

In 2018, Taliban extended their operations to new areas like the district of Khas Uruzgan where mixed Pashtun and Hazara population live. This caused battles between the Hazara ALP leader, Hakim Shujai, his militiamen and the Taliban.³⁴⁷⁷ The fighting, accounting for many civilian casualties and internally displaced people, mostly among the Hazara civilian population, went on for almost one month until late November 2018.³⁴⁷⁸ There are many theories about the reasons for the Taliban expansion into new areas: some observers point to their desire to gain more territory to improve their position in the peace talks, others point to their move to expand their influence among all ethnic groups and, third, some believe that the Taliban want to establish their own administration and collect taxes.³⁴⁷⁹ In 2019 and 2020 there were numerous reports of clashes and air strikes in Khas Uruzgan. Although most victims were AGEs fighters or ANSF staff, civilians also suffered from the acts of violence.³⁴⁸⁰ Most of them were killed by Afghan security services supported by NATO forces during air strikes (for example 11 civilians were killed on 22 July 2019, 9 civilians were killed on 5 September 2019 and 7 civilians were killed on 4 April 2020).³⁴⁸¹

Throughout 2019 and 2020, Taliban militants were active also in other districts in the province.³⁴⁸² To prevent AGEs attacks, multiple air strikes were conducted by US and Afghan forces at the suburbs of provincial capital Tirinkot during the reporting period.³⁴⁸³ Some civilian victims were reported, including women and children (2 April 2019 13 civilians were killed, 10 June 2019 eight children were killed, 4 August 2019 13 civilians killed, 31 January 2020 - five children, two women and one man were killed).³⁴⁸⁴

In August 2019, AGEs besieged military base in Charchino (Shahid-e-Hassas).³⁴⁸⁵ On 2 September 2019 a prayer leader and six madrasa students were killed by Afghan security and NATO forces in the same

³⁴⁷⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

³⁴⁷⁷ Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (I): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 28 November 2018, [url](#); Adili, A. Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Afghan Shi'ite militia battles Taliban, raising sectarian fears, 3 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁷⁸ Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (I): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 28 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁷⁹ Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁴⁸⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Uruzgan; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

³⁴⁸¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Uruzgan; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

³⁴⁸² RFE/RL/Gandhara, In Remote Afghan Corner, Besieged Afghan Troops Cry For Help 06 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁸³ SATP, Uruzgan Timeline 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban commander, in charge of high-tech weapons, among 23 killed in Uruzgan, 16 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁸⁴ MENA FN, Afghanistan- 50 civilians killed, injured in airstrikes last month, 8 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁸⁵ RFE/RL/Gandhara, In Remote Afghan Corner, Besieged Afghan Troops Cry For Help 06 August 2019, [url](#)

district and three days later 26 civilians were killed at the air strikes there.³⁴⁸⁶ 16 December 2019 security forces have rescued at least 12 civilians from a Taliban-run detention centre in Charchino (Shahid-e Hassas), according to the Ministry of Defense.³⁴⁸⁷

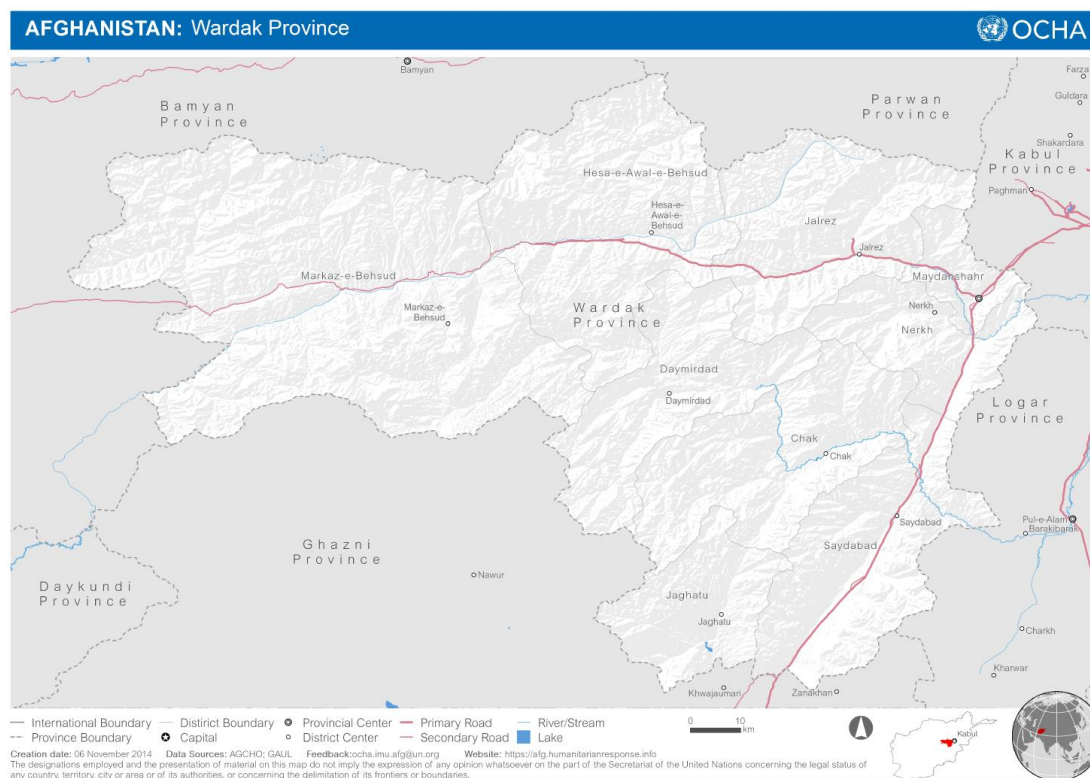
In October 2019, heavy battles took place in Gizab district.³⁴⁸⁸ ACLED reported also about killing of civilians accused of cooperation with government by Taliban. Children were also victims of this act of revenge. This incident took place in Deh Rahwod district on 2 December 2019.³⁴⁸⁹

2.33.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 4371 persons displaced in Uruzgan province. Most of them were resettled within the province. Some families however left Uruzgan for Herat City and Kandahar City. In November 2019, 377 persons arrived to provincial capital of Uruzgan - Trinkot - from Shah Wali Kot district in Kandahar province.³⁴⁹⁰

2.34 Wardak

2.34.1 General description of the province



Map 34: Afghanistan – Wardak province, source: UNOCHA³⁴⁹¹

³⁴⁸⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Uruzgan; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

³⁴⁸⁷ Pajhwok, 12 civilians freed from Taliban prison in Uruzgan, 16 December 2019, [url](#); Xinhua, Afghan forces storm Taliban hideout in S. Afghanistan, set free 12 detainees, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁸⁸ Tolonews, Heavy Clashes Ongoing In Uruzgan with Casualties on Both Sides, 21 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁴⁸⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Uruzgan; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

³⁴⁹⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 28 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁹¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Wardak Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

Wardak province, also known as Maydan Wardak, is located in the central region of Afghanistan and has borders with the provinces of Bamyan to the north-west, Parwan to the north, Kabul and Logar to the east and Ghazni to the south and south-west.³⁴⁹² Wardak province is divided into the following administrative units: Chak, Daymirdad, Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud, Jaghatu, Jalrez, Markaz-e Behsud (or Hesa-i Duwum-e Behsud), Maydan Shahr, Nerkh and Saydabad. The provincial capital is Maydan Shahr, located approximately 40 kilometres south-west of Kabul.^{3493 3494}

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Wardak province has a population of 660 258.³⁴⁹⁵ The main ethnic group in Wardak is Pashtun, followed by Hazara and Tajik enclaves.³⁴⁹⁶ The local Pashtun population belongs to a variety of Ghilzai tribes, primarily the Wardak, Kharoti and Hotak tribes.³⁴⁹⁷ The districts of Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud, Markaz-e Behsud and Daymirdad are predominantly inhabited by Hazara, as well as periodically visited by migrating Kuchi nomads (see below).³⁴⁹⁸ Wardak province is inhabited by Sunni, as well as Shia Muslims.³⁴⁹⁹

Wardak is described as a politically and strategically important province, due to its proximity to Kabul and its location on a crossroad of highways connecting the west and the east, as well as the north and the south of Afghanistan.³⁵⁰⁰ The Kabul-Kandahar Highway passes through Wardak province, traversing the districts of Maydan Shahr, Nerkh and Saydabad. A provincial road runs west from Maydan Shahr to Bamyan province, through the districts of Jalrez, Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud and Markaz-e Behsud.³⁵⁰¹ The areas around the Kabul-Kandahar Highway are densely populated.³⁵⁰² Wardak province has no functioning airstrip and air traffic is regularly interrupted by bad weather conditions.³⁵⁰³

According to UNODC's Opium Survey from 2018, Wardak province has maintained its poppy-free status since 2013.³⁵⁰⁴ UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52 % reduction in opium-poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region (including Wardak province) and the central highlands.³⁵⁰⁵ Central Afghanistan, including Wardak province, is mentioned as home to the ephedra sinica plant, which contains the natural stimulant ephedrine, used to make the drug methamphetamine and expected to take up a central role in Afghanistan's drug economy soon.³⁵⁰⁶

³⁴⁹² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Wardak Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³⁴⁹³ Washington Post (The), Taliban Blocks Major Afghan Highway in Expanding Attacks, 26 October 2016, [url](#)

³⁴⁹⁴ Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Wardak, 2020, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

³⁴⁹⁵ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

³⁴⁹⁶ AREU, The Political Economy of Education and Health Service Delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016, [url](#), p. 33; Arab News, In the Line of Fire: Wardak Residents Struggle to Stay Afloat in Afghanistan, 23 June 2019, [url](#); Adili, A. Y., Afghanistan's 2019 Elections (29): A Statistical Overview of the Preliminary Results, AAN, 8 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁴⁹⁷ AREU, The Political Economy of Education and Health Service Delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016, [url](#), p. 33

³⁴⁹⁸ ACCORD, Query Response on Afghanistan: Wardak Province, Behsud District: Land Disputes, 6 August 2019, [url](#); Giustozzi, A., Nomad-Settler Conflict in Afghanistan Today, AREU, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 8, 19, 21

³⁴⁹⁹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Wardak Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

³⁵⁰⁰ Goodhand, J., Hakimi, A., Counterinsurgency, Local Militias and State Building in Afghanistan, USIP, January 2014, [url](#), pp. 17-18; Arab News, In the Line of Fire: Wardak Residents Struggle to Stay Afloat, 23 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁰¹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Wardak Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³⁵⁰² Goodhand, J., Hakimi, A., Counterinsurgency, Local Militias and State Building in Afghanistan, USIP, January 2014, [url](#), p. 17

³⁵⁰³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, [url](#), p. 11

³⁵⁰⁴ UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 19

³⁵⁰⁵ Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁰⁶ Economist (The), Meth in the Madness. Afghan Drug Barons Are Branching Out into Methamphetamines, 5 September 2019, [url](#); Mansfield, D., and Soderholm, A., Long read: the Unknown Unknowns of Afghanistan's New Wave of Methamphetamine Production, 30 September 2019, [url](#); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2019, [url](#), p. 164; Undark, The Wild Shrub at the Root of the Afghan Meth Epidemic, 20 May 2020, [url](#)

2.34.2 Conflict background and actors in Wardak

Wardak is described as ‘among the relatively volatile provinces’ in the central region of the country³⁵⁰⁷, as an ‘area of high insecurity’³⁵⁰⁸ and ‘a hotbed for the insurgency’.³⁵⁰⁹ Intense fighting between militant groups and government forces has been reported in several parts of the province, with civilians often caught in the crossfire.³⁵¹⁰

The Taliban reportedly re-emerged and gained influence in Wardak province from 2006-2007, amid power struggles among rival militias. By 2009, the militant group controlled much of the Pashtun-dominated southern and eastern districts of the province. Some districts, such as Chak and Saydabad, have reportedly gone back and forth between Taliban and government control since then.³⁵¹¹ According to several sources reporting in 2019 and 2020, the Taliban in Wardak have been strengthening their presence³⁵¹², influence and control³⁵¹³ and ‘enjoy widespread support’³⁵¹⁴ in their ‘strongholds’ in the province.³⁵¹⁵ The militant group’s Khalid bin Walid training camp has reportedly been training recruits in Wardak.³⁵¹⁶ In May 2020, the UN Security Council reported on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made in Wardak province. According to the same report, the Taliban have ordered increased supplies of ammunition and explosive materials for their forces in Wardak province.³⁵¹⁷ Taliban groups from Pakistan reportedly use the route through the southern district of Shamulzayi in Zabul province to deploy their forces further into Ghazni and Wardak provinces.³⁵¹⁸

According to an HRW study published in July 2020, the Taliban’s control over Wardak province is less secure and less visible compared to provinces like Kunduz or Helmand. However, the militant’s ‘Vice and Virtue’ policing is reportedly active in the province, with people being questioned, beaten and detained for offenses against the Taliban’s rules. The Taliban in Wardak are reported to have established a regulated system to collect taxes.³⁵¹⁹

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated Saydabad district as ‘Taliban-controlled’ and Daymirdad, Chak, Jaghatu, Nerkh, Maydan Shahr and Jalrez districts as ‘contested’. A USDOD

³⁵⁰⁷ Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Involved in High Profile Attacks, Assassinations Has Been Killed in Wardak, 9 March 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 18 Taliban Militants Killed in Airstrikes Conducted in Wardak Province, 22 April 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 6 Taliban Militants Killed, 4 Wounded in Wardak Operations: Thunder Corps, 20 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁰⁸ Warden, S., Past as Prologue? What the Parliamentary Election Results Tell Us About the September Presidential Election, AAN, 23 August 2019, [url](#); PBS, What Life is Like for Afghans under Taliban Control, 31 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁰⁹ Christian Science Monitor (The), Inside the Taliban: What These Jihadis Say about Long-Sought Peace, 28 February 2020, [url](#)

³⁵¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Intensifying Violence Dulls Afghans’ Hopes for Peace, 5 July 2019, [url](#); Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#); PBS, What Life is Like for Afghans under Taliban Control, 31 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁵¹¹ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#); HRW, “You Have No Right to Complain”: Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 31-32

³⁵¹² Arab News, In the Line of Fire: Wardak Residents Struggle to Stay Afloat in Afghanistan, 23 June 2019, [url](#); Tolonews, Maidan Wardak Faces Imminent Threat as Taliban Expands Presence, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁵¹³ PBS, What Life is Like for Afghans under Taliban Control, 31 December 2019, [url](#); An Afghan analyst Lifos spoke to in January 2020. Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 52

³⁵¹⁴ NYT, Afghan Town’s First Female Mayor Awaits Her Assassination, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁵¹⁵ International Crisis Group, Intensifying Violence Dulls Afghans’ Hopes for Peace, 5 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁵¹⁶ LWJ, Taliban Promotes Its ‘Preparation for Jihad’, 14 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁵¹⁷ UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-9

³⁵¹⁸ Sabawoon, A. M., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul’s Capital under Threat, AAN, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁵¹⁹ HRW, “You Have No Right to Complain”: Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 48-52

assessment of July 2019, reported by LWJ in the same map, designated Saydabad district as ‘contested’ and Maydan Shahr district as ‘government-influenced’. Markaz-e Behsud and Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud districts were categorised as ‘government-controlled’ or ‘undetermined’ in this assessment.³⁵²⁰

Sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in the districts of Jalrez³⁵²¹, Saydabad³⁵²², Chak³⁵²³, Daymirdad³⁵²⁴ and Nerkh.³⁵²⁵ According to a May 2019 USIP report, the Afghan government had a limited presence in the districts of Saydabad and Chak, retaining compounds in the district centres and controlling the main roads, however its control remained confined to its bases and checkpoints. Residents from both districts stated Taliban militants have returned soon whenever the government’s military operations were concluded.³⁵²⁶ In May 2019, Chak district was reportedly assaulted by 200 Taliban fighters.³⁵²⁷ A June 2019 LWJ article indicated Saydabad as one of the more insecure areas in Wardak, with the Taliban imposing a strict form of Sharia law in much of the district.³⁵²⁸ In July 2019, the Taliban reportedly banned shops and bakeries in the bazaar of Chak’s district centre.³⁵²⁹ In April 2020, the area of Seebak Bazar in Chak district was reported under Taliban control, with militants patrolling the village.³⁵³⁰ In June 2020, the Tangi Valley in Saydabad was described as a haven for the Taliban in Wardak province.³⁵³¹

According to a December 2019 dispatch from AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, Jalrez district’s geographically strategic position has made it prone for conflict and guerrilla activity for decades. Qaane related the district’s importance to its proximity to Kabul, its location along the Kabul-Bamyan Highway and its many side roads and mountain paths leading to various districts in Wardak, Parwan and Kabul provinces. Several of those reportedly served as ‘supply and escape routes’, providing safe havens to militant groups and impeding the movement of government forces. In 2003, Jalrez was among the first places where the Taliban re-emerged and started to reorganise its fighters. Since 2006, the district has been highly contested, with an increased Taliban activity reported from 2014 onwards. According to Qaane, in December 2019, half of Jalrez district was under Taliban control, with the other half controlled by the Afghan government. The district centre remained highly contested and has been regularly attacked by the Taliban, for example in August and September 2019. During larger offensives, the local Taliban in Jalrez received support from fighters from other districts, particularly from Nerkh. 20 kilometres of the Kabul-Bamyan Highway, traversing Jalrez district, have reportedly been under

³⁵²⁰ LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](#); (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)

³⁵²¹ HRW, Taliban Linked to Murder of Afghan Rights Defender, 6 September 2019, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2020:

Afghanistan - Events of 2019, 14 January 2020, [url](#); According to international sources Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 26; AAN, The ‘Reduction in Violence’ Week: What Did (Some of the) People Think?, 28 February 2020, [url](#); 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](#); Tolonews, Maidan Wardak Faces Imminent Threat as Taliban Expands Presence, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁵²² Jackson, A., Perspectives on Peace from Taliban Areas of Afghanistan, USIP, May 2019, [url](#), p. 4; Arab News, In the Line of Fire: Wardak Residents Struggle to Stay Afloat in Afghanistan, 23 June 2019, [url](#); Christian Science Monitor (The), Inside the Taliban: What These Jihadis Say about Long-Sought Peace, 28 February 2020, [url](#); 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](#); Tolonews, Maidan Wardak Faces Imminent Threat as Taliban Expands Presence, 26 June 2020, [url](#); HRW, “You Have No Right to Complain”: Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 31-36, 48-52

³⁵²³ Jackson, A., Perspectives on Peace from Taliban Areas of Afghanistan, USIP, May 2019, [url](#), p. 4; Arab News, In the Line of Fire: Wardak Residents Struggle to Stay Afloat in Afghanistan, 23 June 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghans Celebrate Partial Truce In Frontline Provinces, 24 February 2020, [url](#); HRW, “You Have No Right to Complain”: Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 31-36, 48-52

³⁵²⁴ According to international sources Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 26

³⁵²⁵ Tolonews, Maidan Wardak Faces Imminent Threat as Taliban Expands Presence, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁵²⁶ Jackson, A., Perspectives on Peace from Taliban Areas of Afghanistan, USIP, May 2019, [url](#), p. 6

³⁵²⁷ RFE/RL, IS Claims Deadly Blast near Afghan Military Academy, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁵²⁸ LWJ, Taliban Kills 2 US Soldiers in Eastern Afghanistan, 26 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁵²⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, People Suffer As Security Forces Shut Chak-Kabul Road, 17 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁵³⁰ RFE/RL, How Afghan Women Fare under Taliban Rule, 28 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁵³¹ LWJ, Analysis: Taliban is Caught in a Lie by Denying Al Qaeda’s Presence in Afghanistan, 17 June 2020, [url](#)

Taliban control, with militant's checkpoints stopping vehicles and kidnapping passengers suspected of working for the Afghan government, NGOs or international troops.³⁵³² In December 2019, the Pul-e Hawayi area of Zaiwalat was reported as one of the most dangerous parts of Jalrez, where passers-by were regularly killed at temporary checkpoints. Kot-e Ashro, 5 kilometres from the provincial capital, was reportedly the main frontline in Jalrez, alongside other frontlines such as Bazar Jalrez, Seyah Petap and Aysa Khakbad. The Afghan Local Police (ALP) is mentioned as the main pro-government actor fighting the Taliban in Jalrez, alongside a strong Taliban resistance from Wardak's Hazara community. Qaane's research indicated the Taliban's direct intervention in several areas of service delivery in Jalrez and their operation of a separate justice system.³⁵³³

Several prominent Taliban figures were killed or arrested in the aforementioned districts.³⁵³⁴ In March 2019, a key Taliban commander, reportedly involved in facilitating several high profile attacks and assassinations of government employees, was killed in Saydabad district.³⁵³⁵ In July 2019, the Taliban shadow district chief of Nerkh district³⁵³⁶, known as Aminullah, was killed.³⁵³⁷ In the same district, several senior Taliban leaders, including a Red Unit commander, an intelligence chief and another shadow district chief, known as Mullah Qayum or Obaid, were killed in August³⁵³⁸ and September³⁵³⁹ 2019. In October 2019, the Taliban's shadow district chief of Chak district, known as Mullah Jan or Abid and reportedly also acting as the group's shadow provincial governor, was killed.³⁵⁴⁰ In November 2019, a Taliban commander, known as Asad and reportedly involved in the militant group's activities on Highway One in Wardak, was killed.³⁵⁴¹ In January 2020, the Taliban deputy shadow intelligence chief for Jalrez district was arrested in an NDS Special Forces' raid on hideouts of the militant group in the villages of Ahmad Khel and Mohammad Noor Khel.³⁵⁴² In April 2020, the shadow governor for Wardak, known as Wali Jan or Hamza, was killed.³⁵⁴³ In the same month, the Taliban's shadow police district chief of Saydabad district, known as Qari Jawid or Mansoor and reportedly in charge of a group of 50 militants, was killed.³⁵⁴⁴ In June 2020, a key member of the Taliban's Red Unit, known as Qari Zalmai or Ansar, was killed in Jalrez district.³⁵⁴⁵

The Haqqani Network reportedly expanded to Wardak province in the past and merged there with jihadist groups who were operating south of Kabul. In Wardak, the Haqqani Network has mainly provided indirect support in the form of funds, training, sanctuary and the appointment of local Islamist militant leaders.³⁵⁴⁶

³⁵³² HRW, Taliban Linked to Murder of Afghan Rights Defender, 6 September 2019, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2020: Afghanistan - Events of 2019, 14 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁵³³ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁵³⁴ See sources mentioned below.

³⁵³⁵ Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Involved in High Profile Attacks, Assassinations Has Been Killed in Wardak, 9 March 2019, [url](#)

³⁵³⁶ According to an article from Salaam Times, the district chief of Nerkh district, also referred to as Aminullah, was killed in October 2019. Salaam Times, Sustained Annihilation of Taliban Leaders Throws Group into Disarray, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁵³⁷ Khaama Press, Taliban's Shadow District Chief and His 6 Security Guards killed in Wardak, 7 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁵³⁸ Khaama Press, Airstrike Kills Top Taliban Leaders Including the Group's Intelligence Chief in Wardak, 20 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁵³⁹ Reuters, Taliban Suicide Bomber Kills at Least 10 Civilians, Two NATO Troops in Kabul, 5 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Key figures Among 22 Rebels Killed in Maidan Wardak, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁴⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's District Chief killed in Wardak Airstrike, 17 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁴¹ Khaama Press, Infighting among Taliban Militants Leaves 4 Dead in Wardak Province, 23 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁴² Xinhua, Afghan Intelligence Agency Captures 6 Taliban Militants Near Kabul, 27 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁴³ Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Kill the Shadow Governor of Taliban for Wardak Province, 12 April 2020, [url](#); UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, [url](#), p. 10

³⁵⁴⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's District Police Chief Among 7 killed in Wardak Firefight, 5 April 2020, [url](#); Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban Leader Killed in Wardak Province, 5 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁴⁵ Khaama Press, Key Taliban Red Unit Group Member Killed in Wardak Clash, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁴⁶ Stanford University, Mapping Militant Organizations: Haqqani Network, 8 November 2017, [url](#)

Mid-July 2016, UNAMA reported on groups claiming allegiance to ISKP as operational in Wardak.³⁵⁴⁷ In 2017, a possible emergence of ISKP was reported in the Takana area in Jalrez district.³⁵⁴⁸ ACLED recorded one incident specifically attributed to ISKP in Wardak province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. In October 2019, ISKP militants reportedly fired missiles at ANDSF forces in Chak district, no casualties were reported. Additionally, ACLED recorded more than 25 incidents in which Taliban and/or ISKP militants were wounded and/or killed during military operations in the districts of Nerkh, Saydabad, Chak, Daymirdad, Jalrez and Maydan Shahr; and two incidents in which Taliban and/or ISKP militants were wounded and/or killed when ANDSF forces repulsed their attacks in Nerkh and Chak districts.³⁵⁴⁹

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Wardak is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps. Wardak province is included in the Task Force Southeast (TF-Southeast), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TF-Southeast is led by US forces and has its headquarters in Paktya province.³⁵⁵⁰ NDS unit 01, a paramilitary CIA-backed militia accused of human rights abuses, is reported to operate in the central region, including in Wardak province.³⁵⁵¹

During spring and summer, migrations of Kuchi nomads regularly result in violent clashes caused by land disputes in Wardak's predominantly Hazara districts of Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud, Markaz-e Behsud and Daymirdad.³⁵⁵² When the tensions between Kuchi nomads and local Hazara residents intensified in 2015, a public uprising force, called the Resistance Front, was created by Hazara commander Abdul Ghani Alipur.³⁵⁵³ In November 2018, Alipur was arrested by the Afghan intelligence service on charges of human rights abuses and corruption. His militia group was accused of attacking security forces³⁵⁵⁴, as well as of extorting, harassing and kidnapping Pashtun passengers on the highway between Maydan Shar and Jalrez, reportedly in retaliation for attacks on Hazaras.³⁵⁵⁵ His supporters claimed that Alipur had been fighting the Taliban³⁵⁵⁶, patrolling and ensuring the safety of Hazara travellers on the main highway leading to Kabul.³⁵⁵⁷ After violent Hazara protests broke out in several parts of the country, Alipur was released from NDS custody.³⁵⁵⁸ According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, the Taliban have exploited local land disputes between ethnic Hazaras and Kuchis to gain the latter's support.³⁵⁵⁹ In May 2019, the Taliban attacked the Hazara populated neighbourhood of Mirhazar in Markaz-e Behsud (or Hesa-i Duwum-e Behsud) district (see below), reportedly as a sign of support for the Pashtun Kuchi people in the area.³⁵⁶⁰ In June 2020, dozens of road construction workers were reportedly abducted

³⁵⁴⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016, [url](#), p.73

³⁵⁴⁸ Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁴⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁵⁵⁰ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 14

³⁵⁵¹ Clark, K., CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitaries Accused of Grave Abuses: New Human Rights Watch Report, AAN, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁵² ACCORD, Query Response on Afghanistan: Wardak Province, Behsud District: Land Disputes, 6 August 2019, [url](#); Giustozzi, A., Nomad-Settler Conflict in Afghanistan Today, AREU, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 8, 19, 21; Tolonews, Govt Team Probes Prolonged Violent Feuding in Wardak, 8 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁵³ Tolonews, Alipoor Says He Is 'Ready to Hand Over All Weapons', 27 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁵⁴ Tolonews, Alipoor Says He Is 'Ready to Hand Over All Weapons', 27 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁵⁵ Tolonews, NDS Chief Says Claims Against Alipoor Will Be Investigated, 27 November 2018, [url](#); Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁵⁶ Tolonews, Alipoor Supporters Protest for the Second Day in Kabul, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁵⁷ Washington Post (The), Afghan Authorities Free Hazara Fighter Whose Arrest Ignited Street Clashes, 27 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁵⁸ RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader after Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, [url](#)

³⁵⁵⁹ Foschini, F., The Kuchi-Hazara Conflict, Again, AAN, 27 May 2010, [url](#)

³⁵⁶⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, [url](#)

and abused by armed men from Alipur's Hazara militia³⁵⁶¹, and the killing of more than a dozen people due to armed confrontations between local residents and Kuchi nomads was reported.³⁵⁶²

2.34.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.34.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 184 civilian casualties (108 deaths and 76 injured) in Wardak province. This represents a decrease of 18 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by air strikes and search operations.³⁵⁶³ Resolute Support³⁵⁶⁴ recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Wardak province in the first quarter of 2020³⁵⁶⁵ and between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020.³⁵⁶⁶ In a June 2020 UN Secretary General report, Wardak is indicated as one of the four provinces where 'the highest amount of conflict activity' occurred in the second quarter of 2020.³⁵⁶⁷

ACLED collected data on 604 violent events in Wardak province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 388 were coded as 'battles', 184 as 'explosions/remote violence' and 32 as 'violence against civilians'. Saydabad stood out as the district where most incidents were reported, with 190 incidents recorded, followed by the districts of Maydan Shahr, Chak, Nerkh, Jaghatu and Jalrez. In Wardak's remaining districts, 13 or less incidents were reported. Most violent incidents in Wardak province were recorded in the third and fourth quarters of 2019.³⁵⁶⁸

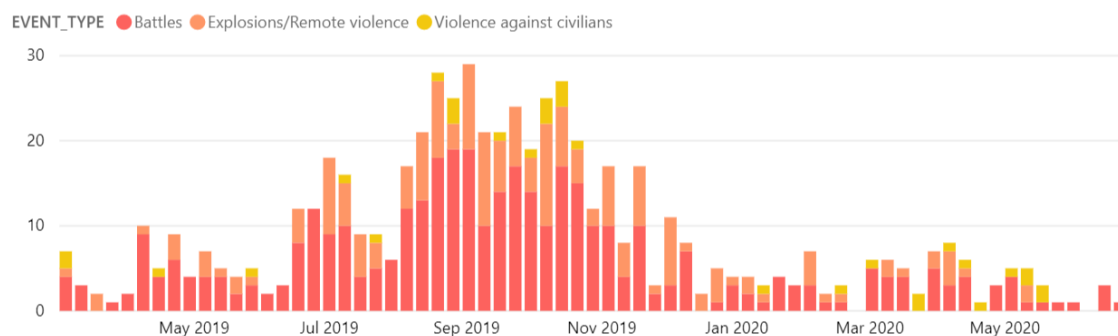


Figure 36. Wardak - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data³⁵⁶⁹

ACLED coded around 64 % of the violent incidents in Wardak as 'battles', all 'armed clashes'. This category represented the most prevalent incident type in all of Wardak's districts. Several of the armed clashes in Wardak were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police and NDS personnel as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis* (the term *arbak* is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias).³⁵⁷⁰ Examples of such incidents included assaults on security checkpoints/outposts and headquarters in

³⁵⁶¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Alipour's Men Kidnap, Beat Road Workers in Wardak, 23 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁶² Tolonews, Team to Investigate Maidan Wardak Clashes, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁶³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

³⁵⁶⁴ Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.

³⁵⁶⁵ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69

³⁵⁶⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

³⁵⁶⁷ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/74/897-S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

³⁵⁶⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁵⁶⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak, [url](#)

³⁵⁷⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

different areas near the provincial capital Maydan Shahr in May 2019³⁵⁷¹, in May 2020³⁵⁷² and in June 2020³⁵⁷³, in Saydabad district in May 2019³⁵⁷⁴, in April 2020³⁵⁷⁵ and in May 2020³⁵⁷⁶, in Chak district in May 2019³⁵⁷⁷, in Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud district in May 2019³⁵⁷⁸, in Nerkh district in April 2020³⁵⁷⁹ and in May 2020³⁵⁸⁰, and in Jalrez district in June 2020³⁵⁸¹; as well as attacks/ambushes on security convoys/vehicles in Saydabad district in September 2019³⁵⁸² and in Nerkh³⁵⁸³ and Jalrez³⁵⁸⁴ districts in March 2020. These incidents resulted in several casualties among the security forces. Apart from the bodyguard of the governor of Bamyan province who was killed in the attack on a security outpost in Maydan Shar in May 2019³⁵⁸⁵, no civilian casualties were reported in the aforementioned incidents.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED, representing a substantial share of this category of incidents recorded in Wardak.³⁵⁸⁶ These incidents involved several ANDSF operations in Saydabad district in March 2019³⁵⁸⁷, in June 2019³⁵⁸⁸, in August 2018³⁵⁸⁹, in October 2019³⁵⁹⁰ and in November 2019³⁵⁹¹, reportedly killing and arresting dozens of Taliban militants. In Chak district, dozens of AGEs were killed and detained in Special Forces' clearing operations in June 2019³⁵⁹², in August 2019³⁵⁹³, in October 2019³⁵⁹⁴ and in November 2019.³⁵⁹⁵ In operations in Nerkh district in July 2019³⁵⁹⁶, in August 2019³⁵⁹⁷ and in September 2019³⁵⁹⁸, several prominent Taliban figures were killed (see above). In several operations in Jaghatu district in May 2019³⁵⁹⁹ and in Jalrez district in January 2020³⁶⁰⁰, Taliban encampments were raided and militants were killed, wounded and arrested. Some operations resulted in civilian casualties -such as a CIA-backed NDS Special Forces' night raid on the Tangi Saidan health clinic run by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) in Daymirdad district in the beginning of July 2019, in which several doctors were killed and the head of the hospital went missing.³⁶⁰¹ According to UNAMA, the level of

³⁵⁷¹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁷² Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Repulse Taliban Attack in Wardak Province: 203rd Thunder Corps, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁷³ Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on: 26 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁷⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Claims Inflicting Casualties on Security Forces in Maidan Wardak, 7 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁷⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's District Police Chief Among 7 killed in Wardak Firefight, 5 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁷⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, 23 Taliban Killed in Maidan Wardak, Logar Clashes, 1 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁷⁷ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Claims Inflicting Casualties on Security Forces in Maidan Wardak, 7 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁷⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Pro-Govt Fighters Killed in Maidan Wardak Attack, 12 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁷⁹ Khaama Press, 6 Taliban Militants Killed, 4 Wounded in Wardak Operations: Thunder Corps, 20 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁸⁰ Pajhwok Afghan News, 23 Taliban Killed in Maidan Wardak, Logar Clashes, 1 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁸¹ Khaama Press, Key Taliban Red Unit Group Member Killed in Wardak Clash, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁵⁸² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019 (updated 26 September 2019), [url](#); NYT, U.S. Soldier Killed in Afghanistan Just Over a Week After Trump Scraps Peace Talks, 16 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁸³ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), [url](#)

³⁵⁸⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), [url](#)

³⁵⁸⁵ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁸⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁵⁸⁷ Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Involved in High Profile Attacks, Assassinations Has Been Killed in Wardak, 9 March 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁸⁸ Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill 13 Militants, Detain 9 More in Wardak Operations, 30 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁸⁹ Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 9 Taliban Militants in Wardak Province, 10 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁹⁰ Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 38 Taliban Militants in Daykundi and Wardak, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 Taliban Killed in Maidan Wardak Raid, Airstrike, 9 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁹² Khaama Press, 9 Militants Killed, Roadside Bombs and House-borne IED Destroyed in Kapisa and Wardak, 29 June 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill 13 Militants, Detain 9 More in Wardak Operations, 30 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁹³ Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 9 Taliban Militants in Wardak Province, 10 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁹⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, Clearing operation Ongoing in Maidan Wardak, 24 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁹⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 Taliban Killed in Maidan Wardak Raid, Airstrike, 9 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁹⁶ Khaama Press, Taliban's Shadow District Chief and His 6 Security Guards killed in Wardak, 7 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁹⁷ Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 13 Taliban Militants During the Operations in Wardak, 6 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁹⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Key figures Among 22 Rebels Killed in Maidan Wardak, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁵⁹⁹ Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces Inflict Casualties on Taliban Militants in Wardak Province, 20 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁰⁰ Xinhua, Afghan Intelligence Agency Captures 6 Taliban Militants Near Kabul, 27 January 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁰¹ Al Jazeera, Air, Ground Attacks Kill Civilians Hours After Afghans Talk Peace, 9 July 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](#); Intercept (The), A CIA-Backed Militia Targeted Clinics in Afghanistan, Killing Medical

civilian harm caused during search operations, particularly those carried out by NDS special forces and other CIA-backed militia groups, is rising.³⁶⁰² Together with Paktya province, Wardak is mentioned as a ‘hot spot’ for these kind of operations.³⁶⁰³

Air/drone strikes represented 15 % of all reported violent incidents in Wardak. Most air/drone strikes were carried out in Saydabad district, followed by Chak and Nerkh districts. The majority of these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces, some were attributed to NATO forces.³⁶⁰⁴ While these air/drone strikes mostly inflicted losses among AGEs³⁶⁰⁵, some also caused civilian casualties - such as a combined US and Afghan forces air strike in Jaghatu district in July 2019, killing several civilians³⁶⁰⁶; an air strike conducted by American and Afghan forces in Saydabad district in September 2019, causing the death of at least seven civilians³⁶⁰⁷; and several air strikes in the Sadmarah area of Nerkh district in October 2019, resulting in the killing of at least seven members of one family.³⁶⁰⁸

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented 12 % of all reported security incidents in Wardak. The majority of IED incidents were registered in Saydabad district, where for example several Afghan soldiers were killed and wounded when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb planted by the Taliban in March 2020³⁶⁰⁹, followed by Maydan Shahr, Chak and Nerkh districts.³⁶¹⁰ Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. This happened in August 2019 in Jaghatu district, when a roadside bomb hit a civilian vehicle, killing a university teacher from Kandahar and four of his family members.³⁶¹¹ In October 2019, a car bomb targeting the convoy of Wardak’s governor killed three civilian traffic department employees in a nearby car.³⁶¹²

ACLED coded 3 % of the violent incidents in Wardak as ‘shelling, artillery and missile attacks’.³⁶¹³ Some of these incidents resulted in civilian casualties - for example in August 2019, when an ANA-fired

Workers and Civilians, 31 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 74

³⁶⁰² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2019, 30 July 2019, [url](#), pp. 10-11

³⁶⁰³ Ruttig, T., “Murder Is Always”: The Kulalgo Night Raid Killings, AAN, 17 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁰⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁶⁰⁵ Khaama Press, 18 Taliban Militants Killed in Airstrikes Conducted in Wardak Province, 22 April 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, U.S. Airstrikes Kill 28 Taliban Militants in Wardak and Ghazni Provinces, 4 July 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, Airstrike Kills Top Taliban Leaders Including the Group’s Intelligence Chief in Wardak, 20 August 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s District Chief killed in Wardak Airstrike, 17 October 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 Taliban Killed in Maidan Wardak Raid, Airstrike, 9 November 2019, [url](#); Khaama Press, 20 Taliban Militants Killed in Ghazni, Paktika and Wardak Provinces, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁰⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Perpetrators of Civilian Casualties Be Punished: Senate, 16 July 2019, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch Tracking Conflict Worldwide: Global Overview, Afghanistan, July 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁰⁷ Tolonews, Seven Civilians Reportedly Killed in Maidan Wardak Airstrike, 9 September 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Fighting Picks Up in Afghanistan After Talks Collapse, 11 September 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, US Forces Apologize for Wardak Civilian Deaths, 14 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁰⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 of a Family Killed in Maidan Wardak Airstrike, 16 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁰⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), [url](#)

³⁶¹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁶¹¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 of a Family Including University Teacher Killed in Wardak Blast, 13 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁶¹² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019 (updated 31 October 2019), [url](#); Tolonews, Spokesman: Governor of Wardak Survives Car Bomb, 20 October 2019, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Maidan Wardak Governor Survives Bomb Attack, 20 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁶¹³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

artillery round hit a wedding celebration in Chak district³⁶¹⁴, and in October 2019, when a rocket fired by the Taliban landed on a civilian home in Nerkh district.³⁶¹⁵

ACLED categorised 5 % of all reported violent incidents in Wardak as 'violence against civilians'.³⁶¹⁶ These incidents involved ANDSF (night)raids and operations in Saydabad district in March 2019³⁶¹⁷ and in Nerkh district in April 2019³⁶¹⁸, killing several civilians including women and children; a Taliban attack on the Hazara neighbourhood of Mirazar in Markaz-e Behsud (or Hesa-i Duwum-e Behsud) district (see above), killing five civilians and wounding a dozen more³⁶¹⁹; Taliban ambushes/attacks and killings of civilians and off-duty security personnel in Jalrez district in June 2019³⁶²⁰, in Saydabad district in April 2020³⁶²¹ and in Chak district in May 2020³⁶²²; a Taliban shooting of a tribal elder and three of his family members in Chak district in June 2020 (however, the Taliban reportedly denied their involvement in the incident)³⁶²³; the kidnapping and killing of the head of Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) of Ghor province by the Taliban along the highway in Jalrez district in September 2019³⁶²⁴; and the abduction by the Taliban of dozens of civilians, reportedly professionally related to the Afghan government, from several villages in Chak district in March 2020.³⁶²⁵

Wardak's voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 reached around 27 %.³⁶²⁶ AAN related Wardak's below average voter registration to the 'high insecurity' in the province.³⁶²⁷ In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 51-75 % of respondents in Wardak province reported to have experienced fear while voting.³⁶²⁸ In the lead-up to polling day, in August 2019, two rockets landed near an election campaign rally of presidential candidate and Hezb-e Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in Maydan Shahr City, no casualties were reported.³⁶²⁹ According to Taliban reports, the main road in Maydan Shahr was blocked the night before election day. In the whole province, there was reportedly no mobile phone connection on 28 September, caused by an imposed blackout on telecom companies by the Taliban.³⁶³⁰ The majority of the violence in Maydan Shahr on polling day involved indirect fire, especially rockets³⁶³¹, rather than targeted attacks. The roads in and around the provincial capital were described as almost entirely deserted. According to an Independent Election Commission (IEC) manager, Wardak's poor

³⁶¹⁴ Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 Wedding Guest Killed, 6 Injured in Wardak Artillery Strike, 23 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁶¹⁵ Tolonews, Three Wardak Residents Killed as Rocket Hits Their House, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁶¹⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

³⁶¹⁷ Al Jazeera, Civilians, Including Children, Killed in Afghan Forces' Operation, 10 March 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 8-14, 15 March 2019, [url](#)

³⁶¹⁸ Pajhwok Afghan News, Maidan Wardak Operation Leaves 6 of a Family Killed, 20 April 2019, [url](#); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 19-25, 25 April 2019, [url](#)

³⁶¹⁹ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁶²⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 31-June 6, 6 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁶²¹ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Kill 3 Off-Duty Soldiers in Wardak, 21 April 2020, [url](#)

³⁶²² Pajhwok Afghan News, Chak District Police Chief Killed in Taliban Attack, 23 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁶²³ Khaama Press, A Tribal Leader and Family Members Killed in Wardak, 7 June 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, 'Taliban' Kill 4 Members of Family in Wardak: Officials, 7 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁶²⁴ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019 (updated 26 September 2019), [url](#); RFE/RL, Afghan Human Rights Defender Kidnapped, Shot Dead, 5 September 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, What Peace Means for Afghanistan's Hazara People, 18 September 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 34

³⁶²⁵ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Abduct 55 Civilians in Madian Wardak, 2 March 2020, [url](#); NYT, U.S. Announces Troop Withdrawal in Afghanistan as Respite From Violence Ends, 2 March 2020, [url](#); Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles Rising in the Way of Intra-Afghan Talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (2 - 8 March 2020), 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶²⁶ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url](#), p. 98

³⁶²⁷ Warden, S., Past as Prologue? What the Parliamentary Election Results Tell Us About the September Presidential Election, AAN, 23 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁶²⁸ Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 62

³⁶²⁹ Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Rockets Land near Hekmatyar's Election Campaign Rally, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

³⁶³⁰ Bjelica, J. and Ruttig, T. Afghanistan's 2019 Election (11): First Look How E-Day Went, AAN, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁶³¹ HRW, World Report 2020: Afghanistan - Events of 2019, 14 January 2020, [url](#)

security situation caused the low voter turnout in the province. For example in Saydabad district, continuous shelling -by the Taliban against the district centre and by government forces against surrounding villages held by the Taliban- prevented people from voting.³⁶³²

Many of Wardak's highways are described as 'not safe for civilians'³⁶³³ and 'unprotected by the government'.³⁶³⁴ In May and June 2019, the Afghan army started to close various small checkpoints along several highways. The Afghan troops stationed in these small outposts, difficult to protect and reportedly frequently attacked by AGEs, were to be consolidated into larger bases, with each about 40 troops, along the main highways in the province.³⁶³⁵ According to an international source Lifos spoke to in January 2020, the Kabul-Kandahar Highway, passing through Wardak, has been insecure for years - with more incidents recorded in 2019 compared to previous years. AGEs, such as the Taliban, have been reportedly active on this highway³⁶³⁶, controlling some parts of the road³⁶³⁷ and using roadblocks to target government employees and members of the Afghan security forces.³⁶³⁸ In March 2019, the Kabul-Kandahar Highway was blocked by an anti-government demonstration, after several civilians were killed in an air strike in Saydabad district (see above).³⁶³⁹ In June 2019, the Taliban reportedly killed three civilian passengers on the road from Maydan Shahr to Jalrez district.³⁶⁴⁰ In October 2019, the same road, also known as Highway Two connecting Afghanistan's capital to the Hazarajat region³⁶⁴¹, was reopened by ANDSF forces, after having been closed since mid-September.³⁶⁴² In July 2019, the road between Chak district and Kabul was blocked by ANDSF forces, impeding civilian movement and trade routes to the capital region.³⁶⁴³ In December 2019, AAN reported on an increasing number of Afghans taking flights or longer routes to bypass roads situated in contested or Taliban-controlled areas. An NGO employee, cited by AAN, declared to use the Ghorband Valley route (through Parwan province) to travel from Jalrez to Kabul, instead of the road between Maydan Shar and Bamyan.³⁶⁴⁴

Mid-July 2019, reportedly in reaction to an NDS raid on a health clinic (see above), the Taliban forced the closure of 42 clinics from the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan in three different areas under their control in Wardak. After a week, the Taliban agreed to reopen all of the closed clinics.³⁶⁴⁵ In June 2020, UNAMA expressed its concern on the scale of deliberate attacks on healthcare in Afghanistan at a time when the country has been confronted with the Covid-19 pandemic, documenting several Taliban abductions of healthcare workers in Wardak province between 11 March and 23 May 2020.³⁶⁴⁶

³⁶³² VICE News, The Taliban Made Sure Afghans Were Too Terrified to Vote on Election Day, 1 October 2019, [url](#); AAN, Afghanistan's 2019 Election (13): Observations from Kandahar, Takhar, Wardak and Balkh, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁶³³ NYT, Afghan Town's First Female Mayor Awaits Her Assassination, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁶³⁴ NYT, A Country Where Driving Makes You a Target, 26 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁶³⁵ Stars and Stripes, Afghan Military Looks to Bigger Bases while Closing Checkpoints in Hostile Taliban Territory, 11 May 2019, [url](#); Salaam Times, Afghan Army Starts Closing Checkpoints, Building Larger Bases, 25 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁶³⁶ UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/73/777-S/2019/193, 28 February 2019, [url](#), p. 14; Arab News, In the Line of Fire: Wardak Residents Struggle to Stay Afloat in Afghanistan, 23 June 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (17 - 23 February 2020), 23 February 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶³⁷ An international source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#), p. 29

³⁶³⁸ Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](#), p. 52

³⁶³⁹ Bjelica, J. and Reid, R., Civilians at Greater Risk from Pro-government Forces: While Peace Seems More Elusive?, AAN, 9 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁴⁰ Reporterly, Taliban Kills Three Passengers in Jalrez District of Maidan Wardak, 2 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁴¹ Al Jazeera, What Peace Means for Afghanistan's Hazara People, 18 September 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁴² UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 September - 6 October 2019), 6 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶⁴³ Pajhwok Afghan News, People Suffer As Security Forces Shut Chak-Kabul Road, 17 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁴⁴ Kazemi, S., R., Peace in the Districts (1): A Chasm between High Talks and Local Concerns in Afghanistan, AAN, 11 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁴⁵ Al Jazeera, Swedish-Run Clinics Stay Shut in Afghanistan for Fifth Day, 18 July 2019, [url](#); RFE/RL, Swedish Aid Group Reopens Afghan Health Centres after Taliban Threats, 19 July 2019, [url](#); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 74

³⁶⁴⁶ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Special Report: Attacks on Healthcare during the Covid-19 Pandemic, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 3, 20

2.34.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 2 865 persons displaced from Wardak province, mainly coming from Jalrez³⁶⁴⁷ district (1 444 individuals) -with a peak (of 1 297 individuals) in August and in the beginning of September 2019, reportedly due to armed clashes between non-state armed groups and ANDSF forces.³⁶⁴⁸ Due to military operations and conflict, smaller numbers of IDPs came from the districts of Jaghatu (with a peak of 434 individuals in May 2019), Saydabad³⁶⁴⁹, Maydan Shahr³⁶⁵⁰, Daymirdad and Nerkh.^{3651 3652} In the first half of September 2019, UNOCHA reported on the displacement of around 1 400 people from the area of Deh Afghanen in Maydan Shahr district, due to clashes between non-state armed groups and ANDSF forces.³⁶⁵³

The majority of the displaced people (2 023 individuals) from Wardak found refuge within the province itself, mainly in Maydan Shahr district or in the districts of Saydabad, Jalrez, Nerkh and Daymirdad. Others sought shelter in the neighbouring provinces of Kabul (Kabul district) and Bamyan (Bamyan district).³⁶⁵⁴ In August 2019, surging insecurity and conflicts between armed opposition groups and Afghan security forces reportedly displaced hundreds of families from several villages in Jalrez and the Maydan Valley of Wardak to neighbouring Bamyan province. As soon as the situation improved, some IDP families left Bamyan and returned to their villages in Jalrez or moved on further towards Kabul.³⁶⁵⁵

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 35 persons displaced to Wardak coming from other provinces, constituting a group of five families from Zurmat district in neighbouring Paktya province who found refuge in Wardak's Maydan Shahr district in October 2019.³⁶⁵⁶

IOM data from the first half of 2019 ranked two out of five persons in Wardak province as IDPs who have fled their home.³⁶⁵⁷ According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Wardak province resided in Maydan Shahr district, followed by Saydabad, Nerkh and Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud districts.³⁶⁵⁸ According to UNHCR, Wardak is one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who originate there but choose to live somewhere else once they return.³⁶⁵⁹

³⁶⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶⁴⁸ ERM, AC401-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Bamyan City, August 2019, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (26 August - 1 September 2019), 1 September 2019, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Maidan Wardak Province - Meeting Summary, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Maidan Wardak Province - Meeting Summary, 23 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶⁵¹ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Maidan Wardak Province - Meeting Summary, 19 March 2019, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Maidan Wardak Province - Meeting Summary, 23 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶⁵² UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁵³ UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (9 - 15 September 2019), 15 September 2019, [url](#), p. 2

³⁶⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁵⁵ ERM, AC401-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Bamyan City, August 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³⁶⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](#)

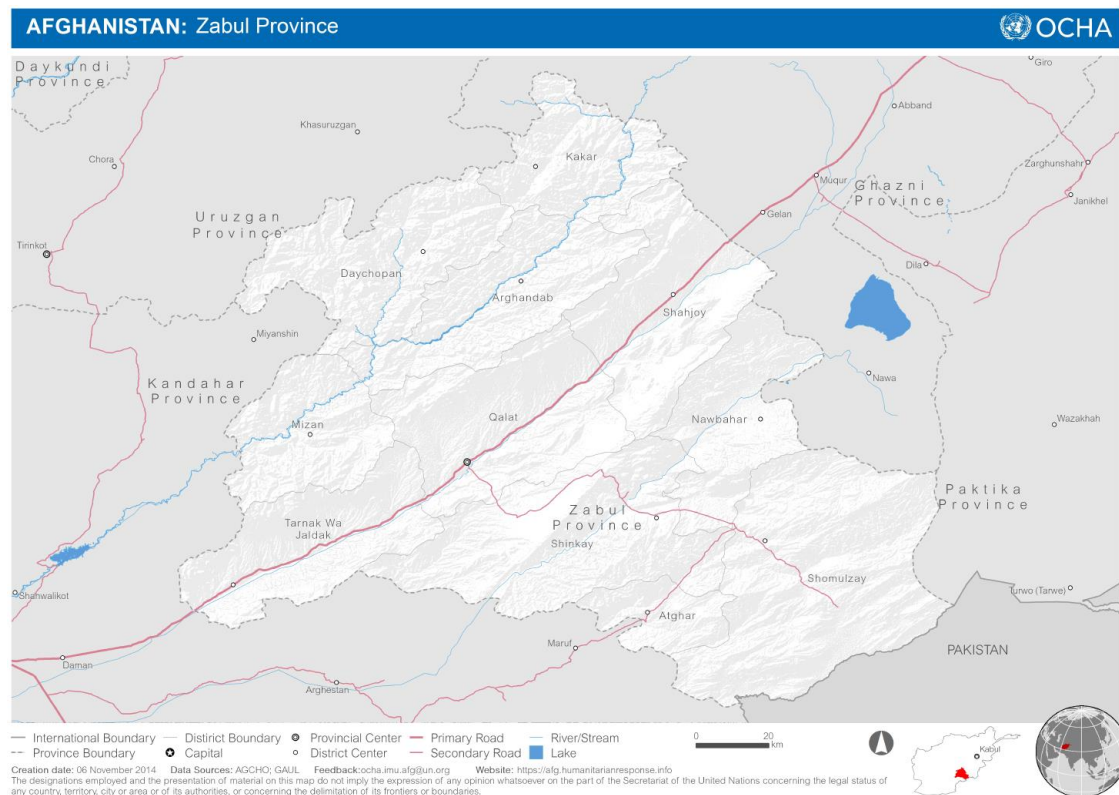
³⁶⁵⁷ IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results March - June 2019, 1 July 2019, [url](#), p. 1

³⁶⁵⁸ IOM, Afghanistan - Wardak Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 6, 11; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) I June 2019 I Province: Wardak, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁵⁹ UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report - Final Report, May 2018, [url](#), p. 19

2.35 Zabul

2.35.1 General description of the province



Map 35: Afghanistan – Zabul province, source: UNOCHA³⁶⁶⁰

Zabul province is located in the southern part of Afghanistan and shares an international border with Pakistan. Among the Afghan provinces, Zabul borders Kandahar, Uruzgan, Ghazni and Paktika. The provincial capital is Qalat (formerly known as Qalat-i Ghilzai)³⁶⁶¹; Zabul is divided into the following administrative units: the provincial capital Qalat, Tarnak Wa Jaldak (also known as Shahr Safa), Shinkai (also Seori, Seyuri), Mizan, Arghandab, Shah Joi, Daichopan, Atghar, Naw Bahar, Shemel Zayi, Kakar (also known as Khak-e Afghan).³⁶⁶² According to NSIA, the population of Zabul is estimated at 384 349 for 2020/21. Urban population, living in provincial capital Qalat, constitutes about 3.5 % of all inhabitants.³⁶⁶³ It is composed mainly of Pashtuns belonging to mainly Hotak and Tokhi tribes³⁶⁶⁴ and Baloch.³⁶⁶⁵ The province is also known by the name ‘Zabalistan’ and is considered the birthplace of the Pashtun ethnic group.³⁶⁶⁶

The province is one of the poorest provinces in the country with many families migrating to Pakistani Balochistan to seek greater economic opportunities. Migrant communities in Pakistan are under strong influence of Islamic radicals and religious parties. Anti-government sentiments are very strong among

³⁶⁶⁰ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Zabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³⁶⁶¹ US, Naval Postgraduate School, Zabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

³⁶⁶² UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Zabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#); Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, [url](#), p 36

³⁶⁶³ Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, [url](#), p 36

³⁶⁶⁴ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul’s capital under threat, 05 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁶⁵ Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Zabul, 1 February 2017, [url](#); US, Naval Postgraduate School, Zabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)

³⁶⁶⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Zabul, n.d., [url](#)

Afghan youth originating from Zabul but living in Pakistani diaspora. It has a very negative impact on security situation in the province.³⁶⁶⁷

The Kabul-Kandahar Highway, also known by the name of Highway One³⁶⁶⁸, runs through the districts of Tarnak wa Jaldak, Qalat and Shahjoy.³⁶⁶⁹ The road has a significant strategic relevance, as it connects the capital city with Kandahar. It passes through remote areas of the province, many of which are not under government control. It is a key supply route for the south.³⁶⁷⁰ Conflict-related security incidents such as illegal armed groups attacking police checkpoints and detonations of improvised explosive devices are reported to have taken place along some highway sections in Zabul province.³⁶⁷¹ Taliban also set up their own roadblocks and check passing cars.³⁶⁷²

Zabul also has a 65-kilometre long, porous border with Pakistan. There are three unpaved roads leading to the border-crossing: in the Zanzir area, near Qala-ye Rashid and further north, from where a road leads to the Pakistani city of Zhob. Taliban militants cross the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan using these routes and the Taliban collect taxes on goods there. Also, the Taliban collect taxes from the illegal trade in lumber from Paktika province's forests that are illegally exported to Pakistan through Zabul's border. However, the central government did not manage to establish any custom facility although such plans had existed.³⁶⁷³

According to the UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Zabul province decreased by 38 % in 2019, compared to 2018.³⁶⁷⁴ The opium trade represents one of the main sources of income for the insurgency.³⁶⁷⁵

The province tried to impose lockdown in the spring of 2020 when 20 cases of Covid-19 were registered but it was widely ignored by the population for economic reasons.³⁶⁷⁶

2.35.2 Conflict background and actors in Zabul

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Ghazni province is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.³⁶⁷⁷ The government's control is however limited to the fortress in Qalat³⁶⁷⁸ and to some military outposts in the seven southern districts.³⁶⁷⁹ Police chiefs and district governors are often linked to the MPs or senators from the region and many of them have served on these posts for many years. In July 2019 President Ghani ordered the transfer or termination of duties some of them. It did not improve the

³⁶⁶⁷ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, AAN, 05 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁶⁸ Telegraph (The), Kabul-Kandahar highway is a symbol of what's gone wrong in Afghanistan, 9 September 2012, [url](#)

³⁶⁶⁹ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Zabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)

³⁶⁷⁰ Telegraph (The), Kabul-Kandahar highway is a symbol of what's gone wrong in Afghanistan, 9 September 2012, [url](#); Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 05 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁷¹ Tolonews, Seven Police Killed In Kabul-Kandahar Highway Attack, 15 August 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Explosion on Kandahar-Zabul highway leaves 3 civilians dead, 7 July 2018, [url](#)

³⁶⁷² Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 05 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁷³ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 05 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁷⁴ Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁷⁵ RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

³⁶⁷⁶ The Guardian, Civil war, poverty and now the virus: Afghanistan stands on the brink, 2 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁷⁷ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

³⁶⁷⁸ RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

³⁶⁷⁹ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 05 November 2019, [url](#)

security situation in the area because some of the dismissed influential figures started to cooperate with Taliban and the number of attacks on soldiers and government employees increased.³⁶⁸⁰

In October 2019, the government started the military operation called Gen. Abdul Razeq (former Kandahar Police chief killed by the Taliban in 2018), aimed at clearing the Kabul-Kandahar Highway around Zabul.³⁶⁸¹

Zabul province has a historical significance for the Taliban, who started their battle over the control of the country in the 1990s from there. Mullah Mohammad Omar, the founder of the Taliban movement, was from the Hotak tribe³⁶⁸² and there are many Zabulis in the Taliban's higher ranks including Mullah Amir Khan Haqqani. Taliban recruitment is also very popular among Zabulis.³⁶⁸³ Moreover, the 'feeling of being forgotten by the government' is reportedly one of the reasons for the considerable Taliban presence in the area.³⁶⁸⁴

The Taliban contest or control most of Zabul, where government forces are under constant attack.³⁶⁸⁵ In the end of 2019, Taliban controlled most northern districts. The government was only militarily present in seven districts on the south of the province, with no possibility to deliver any civil services to population. Apart from Qalat, only Shahr-e Safa district was mainly under governmental control. In July 2019 Taliban attacked military outposts in Shah Joi district where Highway One passes through.³⁶⁸⁶

In July 2019, at least in three administrative units: Naw Bahar, Arghandab and Kakar, Afghan government was operating outside the premises of the district's headquarters, or the administration has been relocated to military bases.³⁶⁸⁷ According to AAN, also Mizana district centre was relocated near Qalat City later in the summer.³⁶⁸⁸

Besides local Taliban insurgents, ISKP is purportedly present in several districts of the province³⁶⁸⁹, however probably it is not military active.³⁶⁹⁰ The United Nations also reported that Zabul is one of three provinces 'with the most significant numbers' of al Qaeda operatives present.³⁶⁹¹

2.35.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.35.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 496 civilian casualties (142 deaths and 354 injured) in Zabul province. This represents an increase of 69 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, suicide IEDs and air strikes.³⁶⁹² Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 25 civilian

³⁶⁸⁰ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, AAN, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁸¹ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁸² RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

³⁶⁸³ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁸⁴ RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

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³⁶⁸⁶ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁸⁷ Tolonews, 64 Administrative Units Partially Paralyzed In 19 Provinces, 01 July 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁸⁸ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁸⁹ Jamestown Foundation (The), Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, 6 April 2018, [url](#); Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 05 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁹⁰ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁹¹ LWJ, Taliban overruns district HQ in Zabul, 11 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁹² UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 94

casualties in Zabul in the first quarter of 2020, reporting an increase in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of the year, with 26-50 casualties recorded (from 1 April to 30 June 2020).³⁶⁹³

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported a total of 722 incidents related to security in Zabul province, of which 479 were coded as battles, 221 as remote violence, 22 as violence against civilians. Since the first months of 2020, the number of incidents and fatalities significantly dropped.³⁶⁹⁴

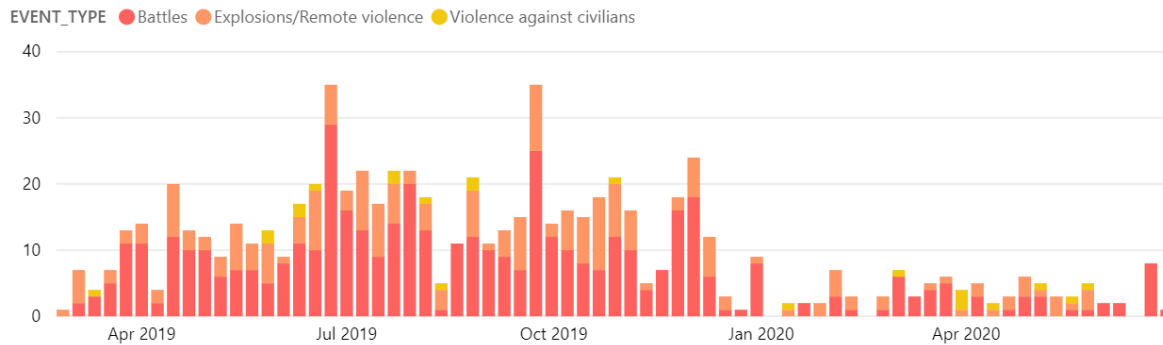


Figure 37. Zabul - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data³⁶⁹⁵

During the reporting period, Taliban fighters were able to target civilians in Qalat City. Taliban or unidentified fighters killed a technician at the national TV in June 2019, four members of one family while raiding their home in August 2019. On 28 May 2020, a human rights defender was killed, reportedly by the Taliban.³⁶⁹⁶

During summer 2019, the Taliban warned people that they should evacuate because they were planning an attack on Qalat. On 19 September 2019, the Taliban blew up the provincial hospital in Qalat, killing at least 15 and wounding 66 others, most of them patients, one doctor, six cooks and cleaner and two of the hospital's police guards. The Taliban claimed that they had targeted an office of the National Directorate for Security (NDS), which is situated right opposite the hospital.³⁶⁹⁷ The main hospital in the province was completely destroyed and abandoned. The only part still standing is a paediatric ward which has been recently adapted as an isolation centre for patients with COVID-19.³⁶⁹⁸

The police and military checkpoints along Highway One continued to be the main target of Taliban attacks in the reporting periods, mainly in Shah Joi district. Some of them were captured by the Taliban and recaptured by government later. Taliban insurgents have been carrying out activities related to terrorism such as shootings, suicide attacks and planting IED bombs resulting in casualties among civilians, the Afghan security forces and the insurgents themselves.³⁶⁹⁹ On 19 May 2020, IED planted in Mizan district killed four civilians and wounded another eight, including children.³⁷⁰⁰

³⁶⁹³ SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](#), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](#), p. 72

³⁶⁹⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus – Afghanistan; Zabul; Event types: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

³⁶⁹⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus – Afghanistan; Zabul; Event types: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

³⁶⁹⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus – Afghanistan; Zabul; Event types: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](#))

³⁶⁹⁷ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, AAN, 05 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁶⁹⁸ Guardian (The), Civil war, poverty and now the virus: Afghanistan stands on the brink, 2 May 2020, [url](#)

³⁶⁹⁹ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 5 November 2019, [url](#); Salaam Times, Taliban lose over 100 fighters in joint security operations in Zabul, 26 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁷⁰⁰ Khaama News, Children, women among 12 killed, wounded in Taliban IED attack in Zabul 19 May 2020, [url](#)

Furthermore, airstrikes by Afghan and US forces continued to take place in 2019 and 2020.³⁷⁰¹ On 4 August 2019, a mortar shell hit a house in Shah Joi district, killing a mother and three children. According to government sources, the mortar was fired by the Taliban.³⁷⁰² On 13 November 2019, a mortar fired by ANA killed a woman and wounded a child, when the army tried to target AGEs hidden in civilian houses in Shinkay/Seori district. The Afghan army tried to blame the Taliban for the casualties.³⁷⁰³ Most victims of the conflict, however, are security personnel and fighters. According to Afghan authorities, from 8 September to 11 November 2019, over 100 Taliban fighters were killed, and 50 others wounded during the operation called Gen. Abdul Razeq. Afghan security forces allegedly were able to evict Taliban fighters from more than 40 villages in Shah Joi, Shinkay and Naw Bahar districts in Zabul.³⁷⁰⁴

There was also at least one large-scale insider attack reported in Zabul province, when on 20 March 2020 a group of Taliban - linked policemen opened fire on sleeping troops at a joint police and army headquarters near Qalat, killing at least 37 army and police personnel.³⁷⁰⁵

2.35.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 4 417 persons displaced within Zabul province. They were displaced from different districts of the province such as Arghandab, Daichopan, Kakar, Qalat, Shah Joi and Tarnak Wa Jaldak. Most of them moved to provincial capital Qalat. The biggest group of 1270 persons left their houses in Arghandab in November 2019, but the group stayed within the district.³⁷⁰⁶

³⁷⁰¹ Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 5 November 2019, [url](#); Salaam Times, Taliban lose over 100 fighters in joint security operations in Zabul, 26 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁷⁰² Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul's capital under threat, 5 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁷⁰³ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](#), p. 51

³⁷⁰⁴ Salaam Times, Taliban lose over 100 fighters in joint security operations in Zabul, 26 November 2019, [url](#)

³⁷⁰⁵ Al Jazeera, Dozens of Afghan troops killed in insider attack: Officials 20 March 2020, [url](#); Khaama News, Abdullah reacts to deadly Taliban attack in Zabul, calling it 'An Unforgivable Crime' 21 March 2020, [url](#)

³⁷⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, [url](#)

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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The goal of this report is to provide security-related information relevant for international protection status determination.

An important goal of this report is to provide details on a regional, provincial or even district level. The reporting period for incidents and events illustrating the general trends of the conflict is 1 January 2018 until 28 February 2019.

The content of the report should contain information on the following topics:

- **General description of the security situation**
 - Conflict background
 - Overview of recent conflicts in Afghanistan
 - Political landscape
 - Peace talks
 - International context
 - Actors in the conflict
 - Pro-government forces
 - Tasks/roles/numbers
 - Components
 - Civilian casualties' attribution
 - Anti-government elements
 - Level of organisation
 - Civilian casualties' attribution
 - Recent security trends and armed confrontations
 - Trends, nature of violence and methods primarily used
 - Impact of the violence on the civilian population
 - Civilian casualties
 - State ability to secure law and order
 - Socio-economic situation
 - Refugees, IDPs, returnees
 - Children
 - Geographical overview
 - Broad regional differences
 - Insurgent control
 - Conflict severity
 - Mobility
 - security aspects of travelling (roads, flights)
- **Regional description: per province**
 - General description (districts, population, geography, economy)
 - Conflict background (description on presence and general activity of actors, Taliban control/presence)
 - Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population
 - Civilian casualties

- Conflict severity
- Incident numbers
- Description of representative incidents
- Displacement

Annex 3: Addenda and Corrigenda

Please note that on 9 October 2020, this report was re-published in order to correct some factual errors and to add some relevant information which was missing in the original version. The following corrections and additions were made:

Page 76:

Addition: While according to information contained in a LWJ map, Ghormach, Muqur and Bala Murghab districts of Badghis province were under the Taliban control [...]

Original: While according to information contained in a LWJ map, Muqur and Bala Murghab districts of Badghis province were under the Taliban control [...]

Page 117:

Addition: According to information by LWJ collected and presented in a map, Gulistan, Bala Buluk, Saheb Koh, Anar Dara and Khak-e Safed districts of Farah province were under Taliban control, Qala-i Kah, Posht-e Rod, Bakwa, Pur Chaman districts as well as Farah City were contested, while Lash-e Juwayn district was under government control.

Original: According to information by LWJ collected and presented in a map, Gulistan, Bala Buluk, Saheb Koh, Anar Dara and Khak-e Safed districts of Farah province were under Taliban control, and Qala-i Kah, Posht-e Rod, Bakwa districts and as well as Farah City were contested.

Page 166:

Correction: In the second quarter of 2020, Resolute Support indicated Kabul as one out of three provinces, together with Nangarhar and Ghazni, that experienced the highest number of civilian casualties countrywide, with an average of 204 civilian casualties each, among the three provinces.

Original: In the second quarter of 2020, Resolute Support recorded an average of 204 civilian casualties in Kabul province, indicating Kabul as one out of three provinces (together with Nangarhar and Ghazni) that experienced the highest number of civilian casualties countrywide.

Page 232:

Correction: As for Resolute Support, it recorded between 101 and 125 civilian casualties in Nangarhar in the first quarter of 2020. In the second quarter of 2020, RS indicated Nangarhar as the province that experienced the highest number of civilian casualties countrywide, with 259 civilian casualties recorded. This represents a 236 % increase compared to the previous quarter.

Original: As for Resolute Support, it recorded between 101 and over 251 civilian casualties in Nangarhar in the first half of 2020, reporting an increase during the second quarter compared to the first.

Page 240:

Correction: In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported a total 142 incidents related to security in Nimroz province, of which 109 were coded as battles, 30 as remote violence, 3 as violence against civilians.

Original: In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported a total 142 incidents related to security in Nimroz province, of which 109 were coded as battles, 11 as remote violence, 2 as violence against civilians.

Page 318:

Correction: In 2019, UNAMA documented 496 civilian casualties (142 deaths and 354 injured) in Zabul province. This represents an increase of 69 % compared to 2018.

Original: In 2019, UNAMA documented 496 civilian casualties (142 deaths and 354 injured) in Zabul province. This represents an increase of 3 % compared to 2018.

