Afghanistan
Security situation

Country of Origin Information Report

September 2020
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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.
Acknowledgements

EASO would like to acknowledge the following national asylum and migration departments as the co-drafters of this report:

- Belgium, Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, Cedoca (Centre for Documentation and Research)
- France, Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless persons (OFPRA), Information, Documentation and Research Division (DIDR)
- Poland, Department of Refugee and Asylum Proceedings

The following national asylum and migration departments reviewed this report:

- 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.
Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ 4
Contents .......................................................................................................................... 5
Disclaimer ...................................................................................................................... 10
Glossary and abbreviations ......................................................................................... 11
Introduction .................................................................................................................... 14
   Methodology ............................................................................................................... 14
   Sources ....................................................................................................................... 15
Structure and use of the report ..................................................................................... 17
Map ............................................................................................................................... 18
1. General description of the security situation in Afghanistan ....................................... 19
   1.1 Background of the conflict .................................................................................. 19
      1.1.1 Overview of recent conflicts in Afghanistan .................................................. 19
      1.1.2 Political landscape ...................................................................................... 20
      1.1.3 Peace talks .................................................................................................. 22
      1.1.4 International context ................................................................................... 25
   1.2 Actors in the conflict ............................................................................................ 28
      1.2.1 Pro-government forces .............................................................................. 28
      1.2.2 Anti-Government Elements ...................................................................... 30
   1.3 Recent security trends and armed confrontations ................................................ 30
      1.3.1 Armed clashes and assaults ....................................................................... 31
      1.3.2 Improvised Explosive Devices .................................................................... 32
      1.3.3 High-profile attacks ................................................................................... 33
      1.3.4 Targeted killings and conflict-related abduction .......................................... 34
      1.3.5 Aerial attacks and bombings ...................................................................... 36
      1.3.6 Search operations ....................................................................................... 37
      1.3.7 Explosive remnants of war ......................................................................... 37
   1.4 Impact of the violence on the civilian population .................................................. 38
      1.4.1 Civilian casualties ....................................................................................... 38
      1.4.2 State ability to secure law and order ............................................................ 41
      1.4.3 Socio-economic conditions ........................................................................ 43
      1.4.4 Refugees, IDPs, returnees .......................................................................... 44
      1.4.5 Children ....................................................................................................... 47
   1.5 Geographical overview ........................................................................................ 49
2. Regional description of the security situation in Afghanistan ................................................. 55

2.1 Kabul City .................................................................................................................. 55
   2.1.1 General description of the city ........................................................................... 55
   2.1.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul City ................................................. 56
   2.1.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 60

2.2 Badakhshan ................................................................................................................. 67
   2.2.1 General description of the province ................................................................. 67
   2.2.2 Conflict background and actors in Badakhshan ............................................. 68
   2.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 70

2.3 Badghis ....................................................................................................................... 74
   2.3.1 General description of the province ................................................................. 74
   2.3.2 Conflict background and actors in Badghis ..................................................... 75
   2.3.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 77

2.4 Baghlan ....................................................................................................................... 79
   2.4.1 General description of the province ................................................................. 79
   2.4.2 Conflict background and actors in Baghlan .................................................... 81
   2.4.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 82

2.5 Balkh ......................................................................................................................... 90
   2.5.1 General description of the province ................................................................. 90
   2.5.2 Conflict background and actors in Balkh ....................................................... 91
   2.5.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 92

2.6 Bamyan .................................................................................................................... 101
   2.6.1 General description of the province ............................................................... 101
   2.6.2 Conflict background and actors in Bamyan ................................................... 102
   2.6.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 104

2.7 Daykundi .................................................................................................................. 107
   2.7.1 General description of the province ............................................................... 107
   2.7.2 Conflict background and actors in Daykundi ............................................... 109
   2.7.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 111

2.8 Farah ......................................................................................................................... 115
   2.8.1 General description of the province ............................................................... 115
   2.8.2 Conflict background and actors in Farah ....................................................... 116
   2.8.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 117
2.9 Faryab ................................................................. 120
  2.9.1 General description of the province ................................................. 120
  2.9.2 Conflict background and actors in Faryab ........................................ 122
  2.9.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .................. 124
2.10 Ghazni ............................................................................... 130
  2.10.1 General description of the province .................................................. 130
  2.10.2 Conflict background and actors in Ghazni ......................................... 131
  2.10.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .................. 133
2.11 Ghor .................................................................................. 136
  2.11.1 General description of the province .................................................. 136
  2.11.2 Conflict background and actors in Ghor ........................................... 137
  2.11.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .................. 139
2.12 Helmand ............................................................................ 142
  2.12.1 General description of the province .................................................. 142
  2.12.2 Conflict background and actors in Helmand ...................................... 144
  2.12.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .................. 145
2.13 Herat .................................................................................. 148
  2.13.1 General description of the province .................................................. 148
  2.13.2 Conflict background and actors in Herat ........................................... 149
  2.13.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .................. 151
2.14 Jawzjan ............................................................................. 154
  2.14.1 General description of the province .................................................. 154
  2.14.2 Conflict background and actors in Jawzjan ...................................... 155
  2.14.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .................. 158
2.15 Kabul province ................................................................. 162
  2.15.1 General description of the province .................................................. 162
  2.15.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul ........................................... 163
  2.15.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .................. 166
2.16 Kandahar ........................................................................... 172
  2.16.1 General description of the province .................................................. 172
  2.16.2 Conflict background and actors in Kandahar ...................................... 174
  2.16.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .................. 175
2.17 Kapisa ............................................................................... 178
  2.17.1 General description of the province .................................................. 178
  2.17.2 Conflict background and actors in Kapisa ........................................... 179
  2.17.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population .................. 181
2.18 Khost .............................................................................. 185
2.18.1 General description of the province .................................................. 185
2.18.2 Conflict background and actors in Khost ........................................... 187
2.18.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............. 189
2.19 Kunar ........................................................................................................ 192
2.19.1 General description of the province .................................................... 192
2.19.2 Conflict background and actors in Kunar .......................................... 193
2.19.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............. 196
2.20 Kunduz ....................................................................................................... 200
2.20.1 General description of the province .................................................... 200
2.20.2 Conflict background and actors in Kunduz ........................................ 201
2.20.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............. 203
2.21 Laghman .................................................................................................. 211
2.21.1 General description of the province .................................................... 211
2.21.2 Conflict background and actors in Laghman .................................... 212
2.21.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............. 213
2.22 Logar ........................................................................................................ 215
2.22.1 General description of the province .................................................... 215
2.22.2 Conflict background and actors in Logar .......................................... 217
2.22.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............. 221
2.23 Nangarhar ............................................................................................... 227
2.23.1 General description of the province .................................................... 227
2.23.2 Conflict background and actors in Nangarhar .................................. 228
2.23.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............. 232
2.24 Nimroz ...................................................................................................... 237
2.24.1 General description of the province .................................................... 237
2.24.2 Conflict background and actors in Nimroz ........................................ 239
2.24.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............. 239
2.25 Nuristan .................................................................................................... 242
2.25.1 General description of the province .................................................... 242
2.25.2 Conflict background and actors in Nuristan ...................................... 244
2.25.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............. 246
2.26 Paktika ...................................................................................................... 250
2.26.1 General description of the province .................................................... 250
2.26.2 Conflict background and actors in Paktika ........................................ 252
2.26.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............. 254
2.27 Paktya ....................................................................................................... 258
2.27.1 General description of the province .................................................... 258
2.27.2 Conflict background and actors in Paktya ......................................................... 260
2.27.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ......................... 262
2.28 Panjsher .................................................................................................................. 266
  2.28.1 General description of the province ................................................................. 266
  2.28.2 Conflict background and actors in Panjsher ................................................. 267
  2.28.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 269
2.29 Parwan .................................................................................................................... 271
  2.29.1 General description of the province ................................................................. 271
  2.29.2 Conflict background and actors in Parwan ................................................... 272
  2.29.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 274
2.30 Samangan .............................................................................................................. 279
  2.30.1 General description of the province ................................................................. 279
  2.30.2 Conflict background and actors in Samangan ................................................. 280
  2.30.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 281
2.31 Sar-e Pul .................................................................................................................. 285
  2.31.1 General description of the province ................................................................. 285
  2.31.2 Conflict background and actors in Sar-e Pul ................................................ 286
  2.31.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 287
2.32 Takhar ..................................................................................................................... 291
  2.32.1 General description of the province ................................................................. 291
  2.32.2 Conflict background and actors in Takhar .................................................... 292
  2.32.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 294
2.33 Uruzgan .................................................................................................................. 300
  2.33.1 General description of the province ................................................................. 300
  2.33.2 Conflict background and actors in Uruzgan ................................................ 301
  2.33.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 302
2.34 Wardak ................................................................................................................... 304
  2.34.1 General description of the province ................................................................. 304
  2.34.2 Conflict background and actors in Wardak ................................................... 306
  2.34.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 310
2.35 Zabul ....................................................................................................................... 316
  2.35.1 General description of the province ................................................................. 316
  2.35.2 Conflict background and actors in Zabul ...................................................... 317
  2.35.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ....................... 318

Annex 2: Terms of Reference ......................................................................................... 445
Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019). 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.

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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAN</td>
<td>Afghanistan Analysts Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>Afghan Citizen Card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGEs</td>
<td>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’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCS</td>
<td>Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANASOC</td>
<td>Afghan National Army Special Operations Command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANSF/ANDSF</td>
<td>Afghan National Security Forces/Afghan National Defense And Security Forces, an umbrella term which includes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ABF (Afghan Border Force);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ALP (Afghan Local Police);</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ANA (Afghan National Army);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>AAF (Afghan Air Force);</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ANP (Afghan National Police);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ANCOF (Afghan National Civil Order Force);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ASF (Afghan Special Forces);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ANA TF (Afghan National Army Territorial Force);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NDS (National Directorate of Security)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQ</td>
<td>Al Qaeda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attrition</td>
<td>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]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWOL</td>
<td>Absent Without Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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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
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.  

*Eid ul-Fitr*
‘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.

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.

IEHCA
Islamic Emirate High Council of Afghanistan

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7 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 43
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.\(^\text{10}\)
KIA  Killed in Action\(^\text{11}\)
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\(^\text{12}\)
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’.\(^\text{13}\)
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.

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\(^\text{10}\) Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, url
\(^\text{11}\) USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 32
\(^\text{12}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 64
\(^\text{13}\) 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+ countries16 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.

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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.’

Information from Voice of Jihad, 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.

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. Its methodology applied for coding and monitoring of the data is explained in details in its Codebook. 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.’

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.

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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 overturns 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

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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: UNOCHA

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. 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.

After this collapse, a period generally referred to as ‘Civil War’ saw different mujahedin groups who had formed new alliances and fronts fighting for control of Afghanistan. War between the competing mujahedin factions and militias was characterised by severe human rights breaches. 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. 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. The US gave its support to the mujahideen front opposing the Taliban, at that time known as Northern Alliance or Northern Coalition.

On 22 December 2001, based on the Bonn Agreement, an Afghan interim government was formed, led by Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun, who also won the first presidential elections in October 2004. 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. Other anti-government elements (AGEs) operating in Afghanistan included Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG), the Haqqani Network 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). 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,
37 BBC News, Afghanistan profile – Timeline, updated on: 9 September 2019, HRW, Afghanistan: Crisis of Impunity, July 2001,
40 CFR, The Taliban in Afghanistan, 4 July 2014,
41 International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011,
43 Guardian (The), The Afghan interim government: who’s who, 6 December 2001,
44 International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011,
45 International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011,
46 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 18 June 2014,
insurgency was characterised by mainly asymmetric warfare: AGEs used roadside and suicide bombs and complex\(^47\) 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

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\(^47\) See [Glossary](#).


\(^51\) 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.


\(^56\) 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].


\(^60\) 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. 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 Jamiat-e Islami party. The crisis also resulted in the consolidation of power within the NUG and in the first eight months of 2017, the government made progress on high-level appointments, which had previously been a source of tension.

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) set a date for the next parliamentary and district council elections in July 2018. However, as a result of security challenges and voter registration reforms the long-delayed parliamentary elections were rescheduled again to October 2018. Parliamentary elections were held in 32 provinces on 20-21 October 2018. 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. Voting in Ghazni was postponed indefinitely due to security issues and disagreements around constituencies.

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.

In December 2018, the IEC announced a three-month delay for the presidential election which was originally scheduled for 20 April 2019. In March 2019, the elections were postponed again, due to ‘problems with the voting process’. Presidential candidates included incumbent Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, former national security adviser, Muhammad Hanif Atmar and also Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. 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. 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.

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 victory, which resulted in the following five months of political impasse. 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 voting, 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)

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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]
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 Ghanis 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. This latter rejected the preliminary results, stating they were based on fraud. The election turnover was estimated to be over 1.8 million, with 31.5% being composed of women.

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

After months of tension, on 17 May 2020, President Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, finally signed a power-sharing agreement. 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 cabinet, 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.

### 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. 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. 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.

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.

80 BBC, Afghanistan presidential election: Ghani set for second term after initial results, 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
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
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
92 Benoonews, Ghani and Abdullah Sign Agreement to Break Political Deadloc, 17 May 2020, url
93 Adili A. Y., Ruttig T., Between Professionalism and Accommodation: The slow progress on the new cabinet, AAN, 13 June 2020, url
94 Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017, 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
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’. 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’. 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.’

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. 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. However, the Taliban rejected the President’s idea of extending the ceasefire and continued to refuse official negotiations with the Afghan government.

International diplomatic efforts intensified towards peace with the appointment of Zalmay Khalilzad as the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation in September 2018 and with Russia hosting a meeting in November 2018 on the peace process that was attended by 11 countries and the Taliban as well. 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.

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. 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.

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. In September 2019, US President Donald Trump declared the US-Taliban negotiations

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

On 29 February 2020, in Doha, the US and the Taliban signed the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan.110 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

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’. 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.’

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’. 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. 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’.

### 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. 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. As of December 2018, there were an estimated 14 000 US troops in Afghanistan. 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. As of June 2020, the RS troops in Afghanistan were around 16 000, 8 000 of which were US troops. 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.

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.

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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](https://aan.com/en/2020/04/30/looking-ahead-to-intra-afghan-negotiations-
a scrutiny-of-different-political-groups-plans-for-peace-
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123 Reuters, Afghan government, Taliban agree to Doha as venue for first peace talks, 15 June 2020, [url](https://www.voanews.com/a/afghan-government-taliban-agree-to-doha-as-venue-for-first-peace-
talks/4573116.html), [url](https://www.voanews.com/a/afghan-government-taliban-agree-to-doha-as-venue-for-first-
peace-talks/4573116.html), [url](https://www.voanews.com/a/afghan-government-taliban-agree-to-doha-as-
venue-for-first-peace-talks/4573116.html)

124 Tribune, Afghanistan’s Abdullah Abdullah to visit Pakistan soon, 5 July 2020, [url](https://tribuneafghanistan.com/2020/07/05/abdullah-abdullah-to-visit-pakistan-on-
official-visit/


126 CNN, US military ordered to begin planning to withdraw about half the troops in Afghanistan, 21 December 2018, [url](https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/21/politics/us-troop-withdrawal-from-afghanistan/


130 Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](https://aan.com/en/2020/03/06/from-doha-to-peace-obstacles-rising-in-the-way-of-intra-
afghan-talks/)
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 tense\(^{134}\) and remained tenuous in 2018.\(^{135}\) Both countries have been blaming each other for sheltering terrorists\(^{136}\) and escalating border tensions resulted in Pakistan building a fence on the border to prevent the movement of militants.\(^{137}\) US DoD 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

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\(^{132}\) 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

\(^{135}\) US DoD, 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]


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


\(^{141}\) 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’. 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.

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. 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.

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. 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. 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.

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.’

December 2016


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

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


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, Pajhow, 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). 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.’

A specific local security structure that has existed in Afghan society for hundreds of years is the arbaki, community or tribal armies. 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.’

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. 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.

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

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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
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."  

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. UNAMA added that the Khost Protection Force functions outside of the regular military command and control structures. 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.’

**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.

From 2010, there was a gradual transition of security responsibilities from international forces to ANSF. 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. 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. In total, 38 countries contribute to RS with the US, Germany and the UK as the largest contributors.

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. 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 period, around 8 000 of them were assigned to the NATO RS mission. The USDOD added that by mid-July 2020, the number of US military personnel would reduce to 8 600 personnel in Afghanistan.

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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, Interop: Transition to Afghan lead, updated on: 7 January 2015, [url]
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 data

According to several UN reports, issued between June 2019 and June 2020, the security situation in Afghanistan remained volatile during the mentioned period. 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.’

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

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176 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan, 8 July 2020, [url]
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]
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 forces\textsuperscript{183}, with sources reporting over 76 attacks in 24 provinces within a week of signing the agreement.\textsuperscript{184} The US also resumed ‘defensive’ air strikes\textsuperscript{185}, the first of which came five days after the deal.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.’\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.’\textsuperscript{191} Within the first week of June, according to the MoI, 222 attacks were carried out in 29 provinces by the Taliban.\textsuperscript{192} In June 2020, Tolonews quoted Afghan officials stating that ANDSF and the Taliban were fighting each other in Takhar, Jawzjan, Paktia, Helmand, Ghor, Kunduz, Badghis, Kandahar, Samangan, Faryab, Ghazni, Logar, Herat and Badakhshan provinces of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{194}

\subsection{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.\textsuperscript{195} During the first six months of 2020, between 1 January to 30 June 2020, ground

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{183} Reuters, Taliban Militants Kill Afghan Regional Police Chief in Latest Attack, in RFE/RL/Gandhara 8 May 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{184} NYT, Taliban ramp up attacks on Afghans after Trump says “no violence”, 6 March 2020, \url{url}; Reuters, U.S. Forces conduct airstrikes on Taliban in Afghanistan, 5 June 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{185} Military Times, US resumes airstrikes against Taliban to halt attack on Afghan forces, 4 March 2020, \url{url}; See also: Reuters, U.S. Forces conduct airstrikes on Taliban in Afghanistan, 5 June 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{186} Military Times, US resumes airstrikes against Taliban to halt attack on Afghan forces, 4 March 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{187} AFP, Bomb Blamed on Taliban Kills 11 Pro-govt Afghan Militiamen, in RFE/RL/Gandhara, 6 June 2020, \url{url}; AFP, Attack blamed on Taliban kills seven Afghan policemen, in New International, 14 June 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{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{url}, p. 5
\item \textsuperscript{189} Gandhara, Afghanistan’s mass release of Taliban prisoners revives peace process, but seen as “big gamble”, 28 May 2020, \url{url}; NYT, Afghans sides agree to rare cease-fire during Eid al-Fitr, 24 May 2020, \url{url}; BBC, Afghanistan: Taliban announce three-day Eid ceasefire with government, 24 May 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{190} Roggio, B., Taliban ramps up attacks after ending unilateral ceasefire, 16 June 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{191} Tolonews, After ceasefire, Taliban average “30 attacks per day”: sources, 4 June 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{192} Tolonews, 171 Govt forces killed in a week in Taliban attacks: officials, 15 June 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{193} Tolonews, ANDSF fighting Taliban in 15 provinces amid peace efforts, 26 June 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{194} Tolonews, Fierce widespread fighting surges to control highways, 7 July 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{195} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 68
\end{itemize}
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

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
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.\textsuperscript{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 17\textsuperscript{211}, and on 4 January 2020, one civilian was killed when an IED attached to a vehicle exploded in 10\textsuperscript{th} Police District of Mazar-e Sharif City, in Balk province.\textsuperscript{212} Recently, on 8 July 2020, a police vehicle was hit by an IED in Golaye (square) Jamhuriat in PD 11 of Kabul City.\textsuperscript{213}

In February 2020, the Taliban published a magazine titled \textit{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.\textsuperscript{214}

\subsection*{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{221}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{210} UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 9
\textsuperscript{211} Al Jazeera, Dozens of civilians killed as the bus hit a roadside bomb, 31 July 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{212} Khaama Press, IED claims one death in northern Balkh province, 4 January 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{213} Tolonews, Blast hits police vehicle in Kabul city, 8 July 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{214} Voice of Jihad, \textit{حقیقت} (informal translation: ‘\textit{Haqiqat} (truth) magazine’), 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 39
\textsuperscript{215} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 44
\textsuperscript{216} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 38
\textsuperscript{217} UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, \url{url}, pp. 4 and 12
\textsuperscript{218} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{219} BBC, Afghanistan war: child used in suicide attack, 12 July 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{220} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-1 Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{221} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, \url{url}
\end{footnotesize}
- 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 songs, 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 PDS 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. During the first quarter of 2020, UNAMA reported ‘an increase in civilian deaths from intentional targeting of civilians’ compared to 2019.\(^{230}\)

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), protesters, 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 Shaidae 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.\(^244\)

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• 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 Maraydan 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);
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{258}

\subsection*{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”.’\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{260} During the first quarter of 2020, UNAMA documented an important decrease in civilian casualties from search operations by ANSF.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{263}

\subsection*{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

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{footnotes}
\item[255] UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 16
\item[256] Pajhwok Afghan News, dozens of civilians, forces killed in Farah, 6 May 2019, \url{url}; UNAMA, protection of civilians in armed conflicts, special report: airstrike on alleged drug-process facilities, 5 May 2019, \url{url}
\item[257] NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, \url{url}
\item[258] NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, \url{url}
\item[259] UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 91
\item[260] UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 64
\item[261] UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict, first quarter report: 1 January – 31 March 2020, April 2020, \url{url}, p. 5
\item[262] NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, \url{url}
\item[263] NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 9-15, 15 August 2019, \url{url}
\end{footnotes}
\end{footnotesize}
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.’\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{268}

1.4 Impact of the violence on the civilian population

1.4.1 Civilian casualties

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

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.\textsuperscript{269}

\textsuperscript{264} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 30-3; 89
\textsuperscript{265} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, url, p. 4; 7
\textsuperscript{266} Tolonews, 100 of civilian casualties caused by unexploded ordnance in 2019, 20 February 2020, url
\textsuperscript{267} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, url
\textsuperscript{268} Salaam Times, Unexploded mortar shell kills 7 children in Laghman 15 April 2019, url
\textsuperscript{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’. 

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%. 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.

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. 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. The majority of civilian deaths attributed to the Khost Protection Force were caused by intentional shooting, mostly during search operations. In 2019, UNAMA attributed 559 civilian casualties including 227 deaths and 786 injured to international military forces.

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 2019; of those, 6,447 civilian casualties (1,668 killed and 4,779 injured) were attributed to AGEs, in particular 76% to the Taliban, 19% to ISIL-KP, and 5% to undetermined AGEs.

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.

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 –

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270 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](https://www.unama.org/content/dam/unama_media/annual_reports/2019/2019_APR.pdf), pp. 5-6
272 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](https://www.unama.org/content/dam/unama_media/annual_reports/2019/2019_APR.pdf), pp. 8, 10
277 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](https://www.unama.org/content/dam/unama_media/annual_reports/2019/2019_APR.pdf), pp. 5-6
280 Voice of Jihad, Reaction by spokesman of Islamic Emirate towards civilian casualty report by UNAMA, 23 February 2020, [url](https://www.unama.org/content/dam/unama_media/press_releases/2020/pr200213a.pdf)
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 northeastern 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


\(^{289}\) 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]


\(^{293}\) 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.’

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 countries, allocating it to the last place in the ‘order and security’ factor. 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. 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. 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.

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. 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. 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). 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 men, IED blasts targeting vehicles, and killing of family members. In February 2020, as reported by the 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, pp. 9-10

UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, First Quarter Report, April 2020, pp. 4-5

UNAMA, ‘24 Civilians Killed or Wounded Everyday’: NSC, 30 June 2020, pp. 26, 33

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

UNAMA, Afghanistan’s Fight Against Corruption Crucial for Peace and Prosperity, June 2020, pp. 40-41


UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, p. 10

Tolo News, Wahid Muzhda, Political Analyst, Assassinated In Kabul, 20 November 2019, url

Tolo News, ’24 Civilians Killed or Wounded Everyday’: NSC, 30 June 2020, url

Tolo News, ’24 Civilians Killed or Wounded Everyday’: NSC, 30 June 2020, url

Tolo News, Families of Slain Human Rights Workers Call for Justice, url

Tolo News, ‘24 Civilians Killed or Wounded Everyday’: NSC, 30 June 2020, url

Tolo News, Families of Slain Human Rights Workers Call for Justice, url

Tolo News, Families of Slain Human Rights Workers Call for Justice, url

Tolo News, Families of Slain Human Rights Workers Call for Justice, url

Tolo News, Families of Slain Human Rights Workers Call for Justice, url

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Tolo News, Families of Slain Human Rights Workers Call for Justice, url

Tolo News, Families of Slain Human Rights Workers Call for Justice, url

Tolo News, Families of Slain Human Rights Workers Call for Justice, 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 criminality\[309\], which started occurring even in relatively safe central areas\[310\], 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 adults\[313\] and children\[314\], robberies and burglaries\[315\], murder\[316\], gunfire\[317\], and accidental killing during a gunfight between criminal groups.\[318\] Foschini noted on extortion schemes (baqigiri) 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

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308 Tolonews, Burial Held for Imam Killed by Blast, Public Outcry Continues, 4 June 2020, [url](https://tolonews.com/burial-held-for-imam-killed-by-blast-public-outcry-continues-4-june-2020/)


317 Tolonews, Crimes in Kabul’s ‘Most Secure Areas’ Alarm Residents, 24 May 2020, [url](https://tolonews.com/crimes-in-kabuls-most-secure-areas-alarm-residents-24-may-2020/)


the situation’. 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.

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’.

1.4.3 Socio-economic conditions

In 2019, the Afghan economy remained largely dependent on international grants, 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. The country has one of the world’s lowest employment-to-population ratios and 21% of the country’s working population are considered underemployed. The World Bank characterised 80% of employment in Afghanistan as ‘vulnerable and insecure’ and consisting of self-employment, day labour or unpaid work. UNICEF estimated the number of children engaged in child labour at 60,000 in 2017 and reported that 30% of children in Afghanistan were engaged in child labour as of 2019.

In 2019, UNOCHA estimated that over 80% of Afghans lived on less than the internationally applied poverty line (USD 1.90 per day). Noting that the deterioration in welfare became more widespread across the country, the World Bank reported that rural poverty had consistently higher than urban poverty; as of 2019, 82% of the rural population was defined as poor. 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. 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 JMMI, which revealed that in the purchasing power of Afghan households had diminished.

The literacy rate was reported to increase to the figures of 43% for adults and to 65% for the youth as of 2018; however, it remained disproportionately high among girls, particularly in rural areas. 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-

Pajhwok Afghan News, Increasing crime insidents worry Balkh dwellers, 26 October 2019, url
Asia Foundation (The), Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People, 2 December 2019, url, p. 18
Asia Foundation (The), Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People, 2 December 2019, url, p. 18
World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, url, p. 30
The proportion of a country’s working-age population that is employed, see ILO, Indicator description: Employment-to-population ratio, n.d., url
World Bank (The), No Household Left Behind: Afghanistan Targeting the Ultra Poor Impact Evaluation, 10 June 2019, url, p. 8
World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update, 28 October 2018, url, p. 29
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
UNICEF, Preserving hope in Afghanistan – Protecting Children in the world’s most lethal conflict, December 2019, url, p. 21
UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, url, pp. 9, 16
World Bank, Hunger before the Drought: Food Insecurity in Afghanistan, 1 June 2019, url, p. 1
World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Building Confidence Amid Uncertainty, June 2019, url, pp. i, 5
UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, url, p. 22
REACH, Afghanistan Joint Monitoring Initiative (JMMI), url, p. 1
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
World Bank, Afghanistan Development Update: Navigating a Sea of Uncertainty, January 2020, url, p. 26
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. 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. 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. 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.

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. The majority of registered Afghan refugees are hosted by Pakistan (1.4 million) and Iran (951,100). Protracted international displacement has defined Afghanistan’s history for long. 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 reigned a new exodus to neighbouring countries. 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.

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’. 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.

In 2016 there was a spike in returns, with about 1 million documented and undocumented Afghans returned to Afghanistan. Over 610,000 people returned from Pakistan and Iran in 2017. During 2018, a total of 805,850 returns were registered from Iran and Pakistan, of which 773,125 were from Iran. In 2019, about 500,000 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran (about 485,000) and Pakistan (about 18,800). 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.

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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
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
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.  

### 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.  

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. 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.

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. 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.

### Deportations and voluntary returns

In 2019, about 505,000 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran (485,000 circa) and Pakistan (19,800 circa). 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. Between 1 January and 4 July 2020, IOM recorded about 103,000 deportations from Iran, and 77 from Pakistan. Forced deportations of Afghan refugees by Iranian authorities have long been reported. In the first quarter of 2020, according to media sources Iranian officials were forcibly deporting refugees on a
daily basis, and following the new US sanctions they threatened more deportations. 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. 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.

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. 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. Since Afghans mostly work in Iran’s informal economy, the demand for their work declined drastically. The imposition of new US sanctions in January 2020, following an escalation of tension between the US and Iran, 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.

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).

Pakistan hosted over 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees, as of 18 March 2020. 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), Liaqat Banori, interviewed during a fact-finding mission by the Belgian COI unit Cedoca in February 2020.

In 2016 there was a spike in returns, with a total of 620,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan. 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. Between August 2017 and February 2018, the Pakistani government, in close collaboration with the government of Afghanistan and with the

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367 New Humanitarian (The), US-Iran tensions push Afghans home to conflict, 6 February 2020, url.
369 AIHRC, Press Release: Reported Abuse and Drowning of Afghan Refugees Aiming to Cross the Border to Iran, 3 May 2020, url.
371 RFE/RL, Things Are So Bad In Iran That Afghan Migrants Are Going Home, 1 August 2018, url.
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.
378 During the interview with Belgian Cedoca in February 2020, Liaqat 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.
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.\(^\text{382}\) 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.\(^\text{383}\) 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.\(^\text{384}\)

In June 2019, UNHCR, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed on a 12-point joint declaration, in conclusion of the 30\textsuperscript{th} 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’.\(^\text{385}\) (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.\(^\text{386}\) 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.\(^\text{387}\)

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.\(^\text{388}\) 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.’\(^\text{389}\)

### 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.\(^\text{390}\) In June 2020, UN General Assembly Security Council reported that Afghanistan remained ‘the deadliest conflict for children’\(^\text{391}\) noting that 3,410 grave violations against 3,245 children were verified in 2019.\(^\text{392}\) 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.\(^\text{393}\)

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


\(^{383}\) IOM, UN Migration Agency Supports Pakistan’s Documented of Undocumented Afghans, 24 May 2018, [url](https://www.iom.int), p. 1

\(^{384}\) UNHCR, Afghanistan, Voluntary Repatriation Update, January 2019, [url](https://www.unhcr.org), p. 1

\(^{385}\) UNHCR, Afghanistan, Voluntary Repatriation Update, January 2019, [url](https://www.unhcr.org), p. 1

\(^{386}\) UNHCR, Afghanistan, Voluntary Repatriation Update, January 2019, [url](https://www.unhcr.org), p. 1

\(^{387}\) UNHCR, Afghanistan, Voluntary Repatriation Update, January 2019, [url](https://www.unhcr.org), p. 1

\(^{388}\) UNHCR, Registration – Now is not the time to forget Afghanistan and its neighbours, 14 April 2020, [url](https://www.unhcr.org), p. 28

\(^{389}\) UNHCR, Voluntary Repatriation Update, January 2019, [url](https://www.unhcr.org), p. 1


and 2,275 injured), which was a 3% increase compared to 2018. 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. Suicide and complex attacks affecting children increased by 67% compared to 2018, 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.

Although there was a decrease in child casualties from air strikes in 2019, 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. 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. 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.

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.

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. 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'. 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'.

In June 2020, UN Secretary General reported that theANA used six schools for military purposes while one school was used by the government and pro-government forces. 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, p. 21
397 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 21
399 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 21
400 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 23
404 Save The Children, Many Afghan Children are Afraid to go Outside, New Survey by Save The Children Finds, 19 November 2019
405 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 31
406 UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, p. 68
407 UN, Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary General [A/74/845-S/2020/525], 9 June 2020, p. 6
were followed by the north-eastern region (12 incidents). During the incidents, nine students were killed and 29 injured.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 27}

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.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 24} 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.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, url, p. 20}

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.\footnote{UN, Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary General A/74/845-S/2020/525, 9 June 2020, url, p. 5-6} AIHRC reported on sexual abuse occurring in schools and other locations in Logar province.\footnote{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}

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.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2019, February 2020, url, p. 23} However, in March 2020, the ANN researcher Rohullah Sorush 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.\footnote{Sorush, R., Child Rights Protection Law in Afghanistan: Can the parliamentary chaos be resolved, AAN, 18 March 2020, url}

### 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.\footnote{Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, url, p. iii} According to NSIA, urban areas display a higher population growth because of rural-urban migration.\footnote{Afghanistan, NSIA, Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2018-19, July 2019, url, p. 2}

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
developments, which caused a feeling of resentment in rural inhabitants. Several sources describe the rural population as ‘more conservative’ and ‘traditional’ with many living ‘in absolute or near-absolute poverty’ and facing realities of war ‘as a part of daily life’ 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’.

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.

In 2015, the Taliban set as an objective to ‘capture and hold towns and provincial capitals’. 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 2017, in August 2018 Taliban insurgents carried out a large-scale attack on Ghazni City. 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’. 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.

According to the 2019 Asia Foundation survey, feeling fear of the Taliban and ISIL was expressed by 93% and 95% of the respondents. 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%).

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. 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,
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.\textsuperscript{430} While the fighting was reported to decrease to near the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 ‘in line with seasonal trends during the winter months’, the provinces of Kandahar, Helmand, Nangarhar, and Balkh were the most active conflict areas between November 2019 and February 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 Khos provinces.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{439} As noted by ANN expert Thomas Ruttig, there are different counts of the

\textsuperscript{430} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 35
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{433} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 36-37
\textsuperscript{434} USDOS, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, url, p. 18
\textsuperscript{435} Military analyst, confidential communication, 14 January 2019, in EASO, Afghanistan – Security Situation, June 2019, url, p. 58
\textsuperscript{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 Nangarhar and Kunar in November 2019.
\textsuperscript{437} Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, Peaceworks No 62, 1 June 2020, url, p. 12
\textsuperscript{438} UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, url, p. 67
\textsuperscript{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 407\textsuperscript{440}, 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.\textsuperscript{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 Khanyab and Qarqin in Jawzjan province, held by the Taliban for around two years.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{447} Highway 1, or Ring Road, which is the most important highway and connects Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, and Kandahar\textsuperscript{448} was reported to be partly destroyed and contaminated with IEDs by the Taliban during the offensive on Ghazni City in August 2018.\textsuperscript{449} The Taliban blocked the parts of the road between Baghlan and Balkh during the attacks on Kunduz in 2015 and 2018.\textsuperscript{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 have blocked roads to Highway 1 in the direction to Kabul for more than two weeks.\textsuperscript{451} In July 2020, local media reported that several parts of the Baghlan-Balkh Highway,

\textsuperscript{440} Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, url
\textsuperscript{441} UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General [A/74/753–5/220/210], 17 March 2020, url, p. 6
\textsuperscript{442} UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General [A/74/897-5/2020/549], 17 June 2020, url, p. 5
\textsuperscript{443} USDOS, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, url, p. 18
\textsuperscript{444} France 24, Taliban killed 291 Afghan security personnel in past week: govt, 23 June 2020, url
\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{447} UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 50
\textsuperscript{448} Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{450} Hewad, G., The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, AAN, 21 October 2015, url; Ali, O., Taleban 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
connecting Kabul with northern and north-eastern provinces, were blocked due to the Taliban-initiated clashes.\footnote{452 Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, \url{url}}

In 2019 and the first part of 2020, the incidents affecting mobility comprised clashes between PGFs and AGEs\footnote{453 AA, Taliban, Afghan forces clash in Balkh province, 18 March 2020, \url{url}}, checkpoints\footnote{454 Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, \url{url}}, abductions\footnote{455 Al-Jazeera, What peace means for Afghanistan’s Hazara people, 18 September 2019, \url{url}; NYT, A Country Where Driving Makes You a Target, 26 December 2019, \url{url}; Afghanistan Times, Danesh Calls for Security Along Daikundi-Uruzgan Road, 22 June 2020, \url{url}} and killings.\footnote{456 GardaWorld, Afghanistan: Multiple IED attacks in Khost and Daikundi provinces April 21, 22 April 2020, \url{url}} IEDs planted on roads and highways were reported to cause casualties among civilians\footnote{457 GardaWorld, Afghanistan, 11 Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2019, \url{url}; GardaWorld, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \url{url}} and police.\footnote{458 GardaWorld, Taliban, Afghan forces clash in Balkh province, 18 March 2020, \url{url}; GardaWorld, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \url{url}} Travellers were reported to face  ‘taxes’\footnote{459 GardaWorld, Afghanistan, 11 Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2019, \url{url}; GardaWorld, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \url{url}} charged along main roads, which became a source of revenue for the Taliban.\footnote{460 GardaWorld, Afghanistan, 11 Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2019, \url{url}; GardaWorld, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \url{url}} 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’.\footnote{461 GardaWorld, Afghanistan, 11 Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2019, \url{url}; GardaWorld, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \url{url}} 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 Highways\footnote{462 GardaWorld, Afghanistan, 11 Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2019, \url{url}; GardaWorld, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \url{url}}, cases of extortion were reported also, for instance, on the highway connecting Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province, and Dar-e Suf district, Samangan province, and the Baghlan-Balkh Highway.\footnote{463 GardaWorld, Afghanistan, 11 Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2019, \url{url}; GardaWorld, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \url{url}} 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 \%).\footnote{464 GardaWorld, Afghanistan, 11 Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2019, \url{url}; GardaWorld, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \url{url}} 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’.\footnote{465 GardaWorld, Afghanistan, 11 Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2019, \url{url}; GardaWorld, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \url{url}}

Afghanistan's major population centres can be reached either by land or by air.\footnote{466 GardaWorld, Afghanistan, 11 Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2019, \url{url}; GardaWorld, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \url{url}} 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’.\footnote{467 GardaWorld, Afghanistan, 11 Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2019, \url{url}; GardaWorld, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \url{url}}

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.\footnote{468 GardaWorld, Afghanistan, 11 Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2019, \url{url}; GardaWorld, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \url{url}}

452 Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, \url{url}
453 AA, Taliban, Afghan forces clash in Balkh province, 18 March 2020, \url{url}
454 Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, \url{url}
455 Al-Jazeera, What peace means for Afghanistan’s Hazara people, 18 September 2019, \url{url}; NYT, A Country Where Driving Makes You a Target, 26 December 2019, \url{url}; Afghanistan Times, Danesh Calls for Security Along Daikundi-Uruzgan Road, 22 June 2020, \url{url}
456 NYT, A Country Where Driving Makes You a Target, 26 December 2019, \url{url}
457 RFE/RL, Dozens killed as Bus Hits Roadside Bomb In Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2019, \url{url}; Tolonews, Nine Civilians Killed in Kandahar Roadside Mine Blast, 3 June 2020, \url{url}; Afghanistan Times, 6 Civilians Killed by Paktika Roadside Bomb, 20 April 2020, \url{url}; Tolonews, Six Civilians Killed in Mine Blast in Jawzjan, 24 June 2020, \url{url}
458 GardaWorld, Afghanistan: Multiple IED attacks in Khost and Daikundi provinces April 21, 22 April 2020, \url{url}
459 Tolonews, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \url{url}
461 Salaam Times, Afghan forces move to secure highways against Taliban’s ‘customs tax’ extortion, 14 December 2018, \url{url}
463 Tolonews, Drivers Outraged Over Extortion on Highways, 17 January 2020, \url{url}
464 Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces, Taliban extort money on Mazar-Dara-i-Suf road, 9 December 2019, \url{url}
465 Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, \url{url}
466 Asia Foundation (The), Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People, 2 December 2019, \url{url}, p. 63
467 UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, \url{url}, p. 69
468 EASO, Afghanistan – Security Situation, June 2019, \url{url}, p. 65
469 UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, \url{url}, p. 11
470 Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019, available upon request at \url{url} (accessed by EASO on 25 March 2019)
Hamid Karzai International Airport (KBL), known as Khwaja Rawash Airport\(^1\), is located at a distance of 16 kilometres from Kabul city centre.\(^2\) In November 2019, a suicide car blast near the airport caused civilian casualties.\(^3\) 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.\(^4\) Herat International Airport (HEA) is situated 18 kilometres south of Herat City.\(^5\) Mazar-e-Sharif International Airport (MZR), or Mawlana Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi International Airport, is located 8 kilometres from Mazar-e-Sharif.\(^6\) In January 2019, an air corridor connecting Mazar-e-Sharif and Europe via Turkey was opened for cargo flights.\(^7\)

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\(^1\) Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg, I Afghanistan (version 3.1), 2 July 2019, [url](#), p. 4
\(^2\) Hamid Karzai International Airport, Hamid Karzai International Airport, n.d., [url](#) (accessed 10 July 2020)
\(^3\) Washington Post (The), 12 killed in Kabul suicide blast, including children, 13 November 2019, [url](#)
\(^4\) Ahmad Shah Baba International Airport, n.d., [url](#) (accessed 10 July 2020)
\(^5\) Afghanistan, Civil Aviation Authority, Aeronautical Information Publication, Aerodrom (AD) Part 3, Edition 89-2020, 21 May 2020, [url](#), p. 100
\(^6\) Afghanistan, Civil Aviation Authority, Aeronautical Information Publication, 21 May 2020, [url](#), p. 241
\(^7\) 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. Surrounded by mountains, the city is located at 1 800 metres above sea level. Kabul City expanded from 12 districts or city wards to 22 urban districts, which coincide with Kabul’s 22 Police Districts (PDs). According to estimates for 2020-21 by Afghanistan’s NSIA, Kabul City has a population of approximately 4 434 550. However, exact population figures are disputed and estimates range from 3.5 million up to a possible 6.5 million inhabitants in 2020.

Kabul is by far Afghanistan’s most populous and influential city, characterised by an unprecedented demographic and urban growth. Massive returnee populations, IDPs and economic migrants have spurred this rapid growth, but the city’s infrastructure has not followed at the same pace. 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’.

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.

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 microraiions (Soviet-style residential

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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
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]
487 Foschini, F., Kabul’s Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today’s Underworld, AAN, 11 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. Kabul City hosts an airport served by international and domestic scheduled passenger flights. 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. 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. Districts in Kabul’s outskirts are ethnically more homogenous. 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. 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.

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. In the wake of several attacks in January 2018, the approval of a new security plan for the Afghan capital was announced and the Kabul Enhanced Security Zone (ESZ) was established. 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. Kabul’s new security measures were reported to have exacerbated the city’s traffic problems and caused protests among residents. In June 2020, the implementation of a new security plan for Kabul City was reportedly ordered by President Ghani.

2.1.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul City

battlefield, but do have propaganda impacts.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{506}

Several sources have reported on an infiltration of the Taliban in Kabul City, with information/intelligence networks supporting the movement.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 insurgency group could turn back to large suicide attacks in Kabul to show its strength.\textsuperscript{510}

According to 2019 United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) figures cited by UNAMA, ISKP security-related incidents have decreased in Kabul.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{512} However, at the same time, ISKP is reported to remain active and threatening, maintaining an operational capacity in the capital.\textsuperscript{513} In June 2020, USDOD suggested the militants might be moving to smaller groups in urban areas, which are harder to locate and identify.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{516}

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

\textsuperscript{505} 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{url}

\textsuperscript{506} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, \url{url}, p. 16

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

\textsuperscript{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{url}, p. 14

\textsuperscript{509} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, \url{url}, pp. 15, 25

\textsuperscript{510} Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, \url{url}, p. 24

\textsuperscript{511} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 110

\textsuperscript{512} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - December 2019, 23 January 2020, \url{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{url}, pp. 6-7; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 9

\textsuperscript{513} UNSC, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/73/990-S/2019/703, 3 September 2019, \url{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{url}, p. 7; Withington, S., & Ehsani, H., Islamic State Wilayat Khorasan: Phoney Caliphate or Bonafide Province, AISS, 5 March 2020, \url{url}, p. 83; VOA, Pushed to the Brink Again, Islamic State’s Afghan Affiliate Claims Deadly Attacks, 12 May 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{514} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 28

\textsuperscript{515} UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/74/897-S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, \url{url}, p. 6

\textsuperscript{516} Jadoon, M., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organisational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Combating Terrorism Center, 3 December 2018, \url{url}, p. 14

\textsuperscript{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{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. 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.

ISKP reportedly applies an effective recruitment strategy (often online, through social media) in the capital, conducting outreach activities in religious and academic institutions, including Kabul University. 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. 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.

In March 2019, the Haqqani Network was described as ‘maintaining a significant terror network in Kabul’. 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. 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.

Attacks in Kabul City often remain unclaimed or are conducted by unidentified armed groups. 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 verified.
carried out by them and the Taliban often denying their involvement in attacks causing high numbers of civilian casualties.  

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) addressing (high-profile) attacks. The independent ANA division for the capital (111) secures the perimeter of the city. The capital NDS corps ensures that intelligence sharing remains focused on the prevention of high-profile attacks.

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 networks, 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 city: home raids and personally-driven murders in central city areas that used to be considered relatively safe, organised petty theft on public transport, armed robberies and violent car-jackings, an increase in narco-trafficking and drug-related crimes in several city areas and kidnappings and extortion by organised criminal gangs. According to UNHCR, kidnapping is a major concern for many Kabul citizens. Foreigners and wealthy Afghans are indicated as the main targets. Several sources report on an ineffective police response to Kabul’s rapidly expanding crime scene. 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. 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.

530 USDO, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, url, pp. 13, 58
532 Tolonews, Criminal Networks Have Political Support: Andarab, 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
541 Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, url, p. 6
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 City\(^{550}\) from 1 March 2019 to 30 June from reports in open sources, of which 49 were coded as ‘battles’, 71 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 22 as ‘violence against civilians’.\(^{551}\)

\[\text{Figure 3. Kabul City - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data}^{552}\]

After an increase in the first half of 2018\(^{553}\), 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 2019\(^{556}\), 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
\(^{548}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 7-8
\(^{550}\) 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
\(^{553}\) 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; 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
\(^{556}\) NYT, Violence in Afghanistan Worsens as U.S.-Taliban Talks Plod On, 7 August 2019, url
of July, August and September. In the last quarter of 2019, as well as in the first months of 2020, fewer attacks were carried out in the capital. Since the second quarter of 2020, violence has reportedly increased. 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.

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 casualties; a Taliban-claimed suicide attack against NGO Counterpart International in May 2019, killing 8 civilians and injuring 27; 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 casualties; an unclaimed attack near the gates of Kabul University, in July 2019, resulting in more than 40 casualties; 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 dozens; 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 100; 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 23.

According to analyst Borhan Osman, ‘high-profile attacks have become less frequent as the insurgents have shifted toward targeted assassinations’. An increase in targeted killings has been reported in Kabul City, 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. Shootings by assassins riding on motorcycles, magnetic VBIEDs and remote IEDs are described as the tactics most often used for targeted killings. In May 2019, political advisor and former TV journalist Mina Mangal was assassinated by unknown assailants in PD 8. In separate attacks in July and November 2019, four prosecutors and one judge were killed.

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
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
567 Guardian (The), Blast Hits Kabul after Briefing on US-Taliban Deal to Withdraw 5,000 Troops, 3 September 2019, URL
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
573 Al Jazeera, Afghan Parliament Advisor and Former Journalist Killed in Kabul, 11 May 2019, URL
and injured in different city districts. In August 2019, 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), a high school principal, an employee of the Ministry of Finance, the Badghis provincial police chief, and an intelligence agent 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. In March 2020, a Logar provincial council member was killed by unknown gunmen in PD 8, the female mayor of Wardak province was attacked by unknown gunmen in PD 5, and the female head of the NDS Gender Department died in a magnetic IED blast attached to her vehicle. In June 2020, the governor for Nuristan province survived an attack by unknown gunmen on his convoy and an AIHRC employee and her driver were killed in an IED explosion targeting their vehicle.

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 casualties; two attacks targeting the Marshal Fahim Military University in PD 5 in May 2019 and in February 2020, 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 more; 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 people; a Taliban-claimed suicide car bomb targeting the Chaharabaf Afghan Special Forces base on the outskirts of the capital, also in September 2019, causing several ANA casualties, the shooting of several policemen by unidentified gunmen near Dehmazang Square in June 2020; and a roadside bomb targeting a police vehicle in PD 11 in July 2020. Afghan officials, cited by NYT, pointed out that attacks on military targets in the city often result in a significant number of civilian casualties.

In contrast to previous years, UNAMA documented a 35% decrease in civilian casualties from sectarian-motivated attacks (mainly attributed to ISKP) in 2019. The single most deadly incident documented by UNAMA in 2019 was an ISKP-claimed suicide attack on the Dubai City Wedding Hall in Kabul, killing more than 40 people and injuring 100 or more.

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574 Pajhwok Afghan News, Maidan Wardak Judge Gunned Down in Kabul, 2 July 2019, url
575 Tolonews, Explosion Targets Media Workers in Kabul, Kills Two, 4 August 2019, url
576 RFE/RL, Islamic State Claims Blast That Killed Afghan Journalist, Technician, 31 May 2020, url
577 Pajhwok Afghan News, Jaghato 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
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
PD 6 in August. The ceremony was mainly attended by Shi’a Muslims, resulting in 234 civilian casualties. 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. 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.

In 2019, UNAMA documented a 48 % decrease in civilian casualties from attacks targeting places of worship and religious leaders. 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. 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. 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’. At the end of March 2020, ISKP gunmen stormed a Sikh temple and housing complex in the Shorbazar area, taking 80 people hostage, 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. In May 2020, a prayer leader was shot by unidentified gunmen in his mosque in PD 6. 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.

A general low interest in voting was reported in Kabul for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019, just over a fifth of registered voters actually voted in the capital. 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. 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. According to UNAMA, however, no mass-casualty incidents were recorded on 28 September. The Taliban reportedly warned students and teachers not to work as

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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
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
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
polling site staff through ‘night letters’ in some neighbourhoods in Kabul.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{615}

Since autumn 2018, ANDSF forces have begun a concerted effort to dismantle AGE groups active in and around the Kabul metropolitan area\textsuperscript{616} with a new Command of the Joint Forces established in June 2020.\textsuperscript{617} Examples of such military operations included: the arrest of six ISKP media activists in April 2019\textsuperscript{618}; the arrest of six ISKP members, allegedly involved in kidnappings, transferring munition and relocating of militants to Nangarhar, in June 2019\textsuperscript{619}, the detainment of four ISKP operatives, including a lecturer and graduates from Kabul university, in July 2019\textsuperscript{620}; a raid on three ISKP cells in PDs 8, 11 and 15 in August 2019, resulting in the arrest and killing of several ISKP members\textsuperscript{621}; the arrest of nine ISKP sympathisers, providing financial support to the insurgency group, in February 2020\textsuperscript{622}; 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 militants\textsuperscript{623}, and the arrest of two ISKP-affiliates, allegedly planning attacks on a hospital and media outlet in the city, in July 2020.\textsuperscript{624}

\subsection*{2.1.3.2 Displacement}

According to UNOCHA assessments, no conflict-induced displacement was reported from Kabul district\textsuperscript{625} 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, Bamyan, 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 Ghori district) throughout the whole reporting period.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{627} he 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 Bamyan and Daykundi) in January and February 2020.\textsuperscript{628}

\begin{itemize}
\item Adili, A. Y. et al., Afghanistan’s Election 2019 (9): Presidential Poll Primer, AAN, 25 September 2019, \url{url}
\item NYT, Ghani Takes the Oath of Afghan President. His Rival Does, Too, 9 March 2020, \url{url}
\item Khaama Press, Command Joint Forces Established to Root Out Terror Cells, Criminal Gangs in Kabul, 4 June 2020, \url{url}
\item Khaama Press, 6 ISIS Media Activists Arrested in Kabul City, 4 April 2019, \url{url}
\item Tolonews, Afghan Forces Arrest Six Daesh Members in Kabul, 9 June 2019, \url{url}
\item VoA, Afghan University Teacher, Students Among IS Operatives Arrested in Kabul, 8 July 2019, \url{url}
\item Tolonews, Afghan Forces Raid Militants Hideouts in Kabul, 7 August 2019, \url{url}
\item Khaama Press, NDS Forces Arrest 9 ISIS Sympathisers from a Landmark Mall in Kabul City, 12 February 2020, \url{url}
\item BBC News, IS Regional Leader Sheikh Khorasani ‘Arrested in Afghanistan’, 11 May 2020, \url{url}; Tolonews, ‘Key’ Daesh Leaders Arrested in Kabul: NDS, 11 May 2020, \url{url}
\item Tolonews, NDS Prevents Attacks Targeting Media Outlet, Hospital in Kabul, 7 July 2020, \url{url}
\item UNOCHA does not differentiate between Kabul City and Kabul district.
\item UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}
\item UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kabul - Meeting Summary, 25 June 2019, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}
\item UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}
\end{itemize}
According to AAN analyst Foschini, 'more than half of Kabul’s residents were not born there.'

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. 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. In February 2019, news agency Reuters reported that an estimated 100 000 displaced people have joined Kabul’s urban sprawl. 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.

IDPs in Kabul often settle in areas at the outskirts of the city, such as Bagrami and PDs 8, 12, 13, 16 and 21, 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.

In August 2019, news agency Al Jazeera reported on growing frustration among residents of Kabul’s IDP settlements, stemming from a steadily deteriorating situation. 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. Afghanistan’s capital has been facing a severe water shortage for some years now, seriously affecting already vulnerable groups like displaced people. According to UNOCHA, this could be a potential source of future community tension.

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. In May 2019, inhabitants

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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
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
636 Al Jazeera, ‘Poor People’s Eid’: How Kabul IDPs Welcomed Muslim Celebration, 12 August 2019, url
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
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 ISETs, adding to a growing database of city areas being formalised.

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) putting further strain on the city’s services and its reintegration capacity. 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. 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. Most returnees in Kabul City depend on relatives for accommodation and other in-kind support. 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. Several sources report on the risk of recruitment of IDPs or inhabitants of informal settlements in Kabul by AGEs and the possible radicalisation of returnees and people deported from Europe.

\[ \text{Sources cited by the Finnish Immigration Service.} \]

\[ \text{www.crowdresearchsystems.com} \]
2.2 Badakhshan

2.2.1 General description of the province

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. Badakhshan province is divided into the following administrative units: Arghanjkhwah, Argo, Baharak, Darayem, Darwaz (Marmay), Darwaz-e-Balla (Nesay), Eshkhashem, Fayzabad, Jorm, Keshem, Khash, Khwahan, Kofab, Kohestan, Koran wa Munjan, Raghestan, Shar-e-Buzorg, Shignan, Shaki, Shuhada, Tagab, Teshkan, Wakhan, Warduj, Yaftal-e-Sufila, Yamgan (Girwan), Yawan, and Zebak. Most of the province is mountainous. The provincial capital is Fayzabad.

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. The main ethnic groups in the province are Tajiks and Uzbeks.

As of July 2020, scheduled passenger services between Fayzabad and Kabul were provided.

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651 UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Badakhshan Province- District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
652 UNOCHA, Reference Map Badakhshan Province, 19 February 2014, [url]
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
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-Sufia and Yawan districts as ‘government-controlled’ and the remaining districts in Badakhshan province as ‘contested’.\(^{666}\)

Besides local Taliban fighters, Tajik, Uzbek, Uyghur,\(^{667}\) and to a lesser extent Russian and Turkmen nationals were reportedly fighting in several districts of the province in 2017\(^{668}\), 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

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661 NYT, Captives or Defectors? Taliban Fighters Tell Conflicting Tales, 7 November 2019, [url](http://www.nytimes.com), NYT, A Desperate Battle, and a Victory for Now, at a Remote Afghan Outpost, 26 September 2019, [url](http://www.nytimes.com), p. 15


665 Washington Post (The), In Afghanistan’s northeast, fears of a Taliban return, 19 October 2019, [url](http://www.washingtonpost.com), p. 27

666 LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](http://www.lwjournal.org), The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.


668 Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url](http://www.aan.com), p. 27

669 NYT, A Desperate Battle, and a Victory for Now, at a Remote Afghan Outpost, 26 September 2019, [url](http://www.nytimes.com), Khaama Press, 2 Chechen militants killed, wounded in Badakhshan artillery strikes, 25 March 2020, [url](http://www.khaama.com), Tolonews, Badakhshan Governor Claims Taliban Has Ties with Foreign Fighters, 10 April 2020, [url](http://www.tolonews.com)


source indicated that the Badakhshan Taliban are a comparatively heterogeneous movement, facilitating ‘[...] a hybridization of the local insurgency in the name of the Taliban’. 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.’ 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. 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. The June 2019 UN report also mentioned 400 foreign fighters for the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), operating in Badakhshan, mainly in Warduj and Raghastan districts, with financing based in the latter. 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.

A 2017 analysis of ISKP in Afghanistan indicates that ISKP presence was less intense in Badakhshan than in nearby Kunduz and Takhar provinces. A researcher for the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) mentioned small pockets of ISKP emerging in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces in August 2019. 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. 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. The 217th Corps has its headquarters in Kunduz. 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, [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 Spiveyzai (@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
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{685}

\textbf{2.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population}\n
\textbf{2.2.3.1 General}\n
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{689}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{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 data.\textsuperscript{690}}
\end{figure}

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

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{684} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, \url{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{url}, pp. 27-28
\item \textsuperscript{685} NYT, Captives or Defectors? Taliban Fighters Tell Conflicting Tales. 7 November 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{686} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 94. No UNAMA data on civilian casualties in Badakhshan province were available for the first half of 2020.
\item \textsuperscript{687} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 72
\item \textsuperscript{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{url}
\item \textsuperscript{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{url}
\item \textsuperscript{690} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badakhshan, \url{url}
\end{itemize}
Warduj, Jorm and Kohestan districts. 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) or attacks on military or police facilities such as checkpoints, military bases and sometimes attacks on vehicles.

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 2019 or an operation in Jorm district in April 2020 were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED. Most of the security operations in Badakhshan were carried out in September 2019 and April 2020. Some of these operations were backed by air strikes, for example in Warduj and Nesay districts in April 2020.

During an attack in Afghanjkhwah district on 29 March 2019, the Taliban were able to capture the district, before government forces recaptured it on 2 April 2019. The Taliban attacked the centre of Jorm district on 14 April 2019, 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. 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. They were able to recapture three of Badakhshan’s districts, two of which, Warduj and Yamgan, having been under Taliban control for about four years, while Koran wa Munjan had been captured by the Taliban on 22 July 2019. On 7 September 2019, the security forces were also able to clear parts of

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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
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
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
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 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. 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 attacks, the Taliban managed to take control again of Yamgan district and of some villages in Jorm district, inflicting casualties on Afghan security forces there.

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’ 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. While those air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs, some also caused civilian casualties, for example in Warduj district on 14 October 2019, when an air strike killed eight civilians, including children. Incidents where the Taliban or unidentified armed groups used roadside bombs and IEDs to target Afghan and international security forces or government officials, represented 9% of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Badakhshan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. 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 2019 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.


One of the major air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under ‘battles’. For more information on ACLED’s methodology, please consult the introduction.

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), https://www.acled.org


AP, Separate attacks kill 14 Afghan forces in Kabul, northeast, 6 June 2020, https://www.apnews.com/25380f3c329b4a57bb03f5b42b4e60c4

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), https://www.acled.org


Nine incidents categorised by ACLED as ‘violence against civilians’ included the killing of MoI officials\textsuperscript{718}, the father of a police commander\textsuperscript{719} and a civilian accused of being a government spy\textsuperscript{720} 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 commanders\textsuperscript{721} or on suspicion of being government spies.\textsuperscript{722} Civilians were also killed in an attack, carried out by unidentified armed men on a mosque in Argo district in December 2019.\textsuperscript{723} Four civilians were killed for unknown reasons in a Taliban-controlled area in Arghanjikhwah district in June 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{729}

\subsection*{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 centre\textsuperscript{732} and military operations followed.\textsuperscript{733} In the last days of June 2020 UNOCHA noted the ‘most significant

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{718} Khaama Press, Taliban kills two MOI officials in Jurm district of Badakhshan, 14 November 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{719} Pajhwok Afghan News, Badakhshan detective chief wounded, father killed, 3 October 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{720} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{721} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{722} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban execute 5 civilians over cooperation with govt, 23 June 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{723} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 worshippers killed in Badakhshan gun attack, 12 December 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{724} Ariana News, Taliban gunned down four civilians in Badakhshan: official, 2 June 2020, \url{url}; Pasbanan, Four member of a family were killed in Badakhshan, 2 June 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{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{url}
\item \textsuperscript{726} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, p. 14
\item \textsuperscript{727} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, \url{url}; Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, \url{url}, p. 10; NYT, To Disrupt Elections, Taliban Turn to an Old Tactic: Destroying Cell Towers, 2 October 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{728} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 January - 12 January 2019), 15 January 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{729} WHO, Afghanistan. Attacks on Health care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019 \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{730} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 September 2019), 25 September 2019, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 - 29 September 2019), 2 October 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{731} Tolonews, Large-Scale Military Operations Launched In Badakhshan, 29 August 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{732} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (29 July - 04 August 2019), 7 August 2019, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 - 11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture Badakhshan’s Karan wa Menjan district, 22 July 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{733} Tolonews, Large-Scale Military Operations Launched In Badakhshan, 29 August 2019, \url{url}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
displacement since March 2020’ in three north-eastern provinces, including Badakhshan.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 June – 28 June 2020), 1 July 2020, \url{url}} No conflict-induced displacement was registered from over half of Badakhshan’s districts, including Fayzabad.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}}

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.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}}

\section*{2.3 Badghis}

\subsection*{2.3.1 General description of the province}

The province of Badghis is located in northwestern Afghanistan\footnote{Khaama Press, 29 Taliban militants killed, wounded in separate incidents in Badghis province, 14 April 2020, \url{url}} alongside the border with Turkmenistan.\footnote{RFERL, Officials: 25 elite commandos killed in clashes with Taliban, 17 July 2019, \url{url}} 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...
Qala-i Naw.\textsuperscript{740} The district of Ghormach reportedly became part of Faryab in 2017.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{743} NSIA estimated the population of Badghis province for 2020-21 at 549 583.\textsuperscript{744} According to the Office of the President of Afghanistan, Badghis is inhabited mainly by Tajiks, Pashtuns, Uzbeks, and Turkmens.\textsuperscript{745} The roads of Badghis have been reported to be in bad condition and mostly unsafe because of insurgent and criminal activity.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{747} The population relies entirely on rainfall for agriculture and drinking water and the food insecurity reached a crisis level. Drought\textsuperscript{748} and natural disasters made people in Badghis province vulnerable to recruitment by insurgents and militants due to the famine.\textsuperscript{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 drought\textsuperscript{750}, but also because UNODC counted the district Ghormach, which is a major poppy cultivating district, as part of Faryab in 2018.\textsuperscript{754} According to AAN, in 2019, opium-poppy cultivation in the four western provinces including in Badghis has decreased by 23\% compared to 2018.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{754} After the fall of the Taliban, several influential warlords ruled Badghis, among them Abdul Malik, Rashid Dostum, Juma Khan, and Ismail Khan.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{741} Ali, O., Rutig, 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
\textsuperscript{742} Frontier Post (The), Ghormach falls to Taliban as ANA troops move to Maimana, 28 August 2018, url
\textsuperscript{743} Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, url
\textsuperscript{744} Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., url, p. 5
\textsuperscript{745} Afghanistan, Office of the Prime Minister, Provincial Profile Badghis, 1 February 2017, url
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{747} Pajhwok Afghan News, Decrees on $100m loan for 2 projects approved, 6 January 2020, url
\textsuperscript{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)
\textsuperscript{749} National Geographic, In Afghanistan, climate change complicates prospects for peace, 3 February 2020, url
\textsuperscript{750} UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 16
\textsuperscript{751} UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 17
\textsuperscript{752} AAN, New world drug report: opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, 25 June 2020, url
\textsuperscript{753} Salaam Times, Afghan border forces, police block Taliban drug trafficking route in Herat, 5 July 2019, url
\textsuperscript{754} Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, url
\textsuperscript{755} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Badghis Provincial Overview, n.d., url
insurgents and government forces in Jawand and Qadis. Since 2014, Badghis province has been a hotbed of fighting between the Taliban, IMU and ANDSF. Since 2016, Badghis was amongst the western provinces witnessing clashes between Taliban factions each loyal to a different commander. In July 2019, Khaama Press reported that Badghis province was one of the ‘relatively volatile’ northwestern provinces of Afghanistan.

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. 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.’ While according to information contained in a LWJ map, 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.

In December 2019, Taliban issued a statement claiming that they have taken the control of Bala Murghab district capital 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. On 4 May 2020, Taliban reported that several of Mujahidin (Taliban fighters) were graduated from Saad Ben Abi Weqas 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.

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. 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. 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 افغانستان از افراشته انتخابات 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 بحیرہ کال فتحاکتو ته خلیلندگی ته کا [informal translation: ‘a quick look at last year’s victories’], 31 December 2019, url
764 SubheKabul, خودکشی یک دختر جوان در ولایت بادغیس [informal translation: ‘a young girl committed suicide in Badghis Province’], 3 March 2020, url
765 Voice of Jihad, بادغیس: چکی اسکونه مجاهمین د سعد بن ابراهیم واقع له معاصرکه نه فارغ شول [informal translation’ Badghis: tens of Mujahidin (fighters) were graduated from Saad Ben Abi Weqas 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
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

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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, [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 Talibain 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 Talibain and ANA in Ab Kamari district on 17 July 2019;780 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 Talibain783; on 27 July 2019 an air strike reportedly killed four civilians including a tribal leader, following their meeting with the Talibain officials in Regi village of Jawand district784; on 30 October 2019, a civilian driver was killed by the Talibain 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 Talibain commander was bombed by an air strike in the village of Maidah Qol in Aa Kamari district;786 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 Talibain 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 Talibain exploded in Chashma-Dozdak village of Muqur district789, on 1 May 2020, the Talibain 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% 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

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779 Salaam Times, Talibain’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: Talibain blow up newly constructed school in Badghis, 13 May 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

Baghlan province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Bamyan, Samangan, Kunduz, Taljar, 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, Khwajahejrjan (Jalga), Nahrin, Pul-e Hesar, Pul-e Khumri, and Tala wa Barfk. 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
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. At the border between Baghlan and Parwan, the highway leads through the notoriously overcrowded and desolate Salang Tunnel. 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. Baghlan’s capital Pul-e Khumri is known to be an economic hub.

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. 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. 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. AGEs reportedly draw revenue from extorting money from fuel trucks passing through Baghlan.

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.

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. One participant in the April protest was killed and six others wounded when security forces opened fire to clear the road.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Baghlan does not belong to the ten main opium-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan. Opium poppy cultivation in Baghlan remained approximately the same in 2018 compared to 2017.

802 Pajhwok Afghan News, Current Salang tunnel insufficient, says President Ghani, 15 October 2018, Diplomat (The), Fixing the Salang Pass Tunnel, 21 October 2015.
803 World Bank (The), Trans-Hindukush Road Connectivity Project, n.d.
804 Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan administrative units, n.d.
808 Salam Watandar, Taliban collecting billions through illicit customs, religious taxes, 16 May 2019.
812 UNODC and Afghanistan, McN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, p. 17
813 UNODC and Afghanistan, McN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, 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, Afghan 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 Talibab 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 ‘Talibab-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
818 Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, 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
826 LWJ, Mapping Talibab 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-i 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

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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]
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
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
engagements followed by targeted/deliberate killings and non-suicide IEDs.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{841}

<table>
<thead>
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<th>EVENT_TYPE</th>
<th>Battles</th>
<th>Explosions/Remote violence</th>
<th>Violence against civilians</th>
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<td>10</td>
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</tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Oct 2019</td>
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<td>16</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 2020</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 data\textsuperscript{842}

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.\textsuperscript{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)\textsuperscript{844}, or attacks on military or police facilities such

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\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{842} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Baghlan, url.

\textsuperscript{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.

as checkpoints\(^{845}\), bases\(^{846}\) and headquarters\(^{847}\) 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 2019\(^{854}\) 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 2019\(^{857}\), the centre of Guzargah-e Nur district in July 2019\(^{858}\), 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.\(^{860}\)

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
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
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 IEDs or magnetic bombs to target security forces. 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 Khumri, 4 June 2019 when people leaving a mosque after Eid prayers in Nahrin district were hit by a bomb explosion or 4 November 2019, when a road mine blast hit a family in Dand-e Shahabuddin area of Pul-e Khumri City.

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. 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. 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.

ACLED coded a few incidents of shelling in Baghlan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. 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 playing 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.

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. These included the kidnapping and/or killing by armed groups, including the Taliban, of an off-duty soldier in Baghlan-e Jadid in June 2020.

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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]
865 Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 worshipers killed, 12 injured in Baghlan blast, 4 June 2019, [url]; Khmaa Press, 2 civilians killed, 14 wounded in an explosion in Baghlan province, 4 June 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]
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]
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]
2019\(^{874}\), of government representatives and employees near Pul-e Khumri in August 2019\(^{875}\), of civilians in Nahrin district in September 2019\(^{876}\), of education personnel in Nahrin district in May 2019 and in Baghlan-e Jadid and Doshi district in November 2019\(^{877}\) 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 2020\(^{886}\) 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 Ghori 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
\(^{876}\) NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url
\(^{877}\) NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 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
\(^{880}\) Reportedly, 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
\(^{884}\) 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. According to further investigation by UNAMA, the doctor had received dead threats from the Taliban. 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.

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.

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. The police headquarters in Pul-e Khumri City were the target of a coordinated attack, involving a suicide bombing, on 5 May 2019. On 2 February 2020, a suicide bomber detonated his explosives before he had reached his target, an engagement ceremony, in Pul-e Khumri. Such attacks, which have been carried out in other larger cities in Afghanistan as well, were not reported from other districts in Baghlan province.

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. 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. 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. During the attack, the Taliban forcibly entered residential homes. According to the head of the provincial council in Baghlan, heavy fighting caused people to panic and to try to flee. The attackers were pushed back, but clashes continued on the outskirts of

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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
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., Rutting T., Taliban 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
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{905} Civilian casualties and displacement were reported.\textsuperscript{906} While operations where carried out for reopening the Kabul-North and the Pul-e Khumri-Mazar Highways\textsuperscript{907}, exit routes from the city remained contested and movement obstructed during more than a week following the attack.\textsuperscript{908} Checkpoints established by the Taliban in Baghlan-e Jadid district were obstructing traffic to the north, although civilians were reportedly allowed to pass.\textsuperscript{909} Telecommunications and road movements were intermittently disrupted.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{912}

Taliban presence lead to regular attacks, fighting and security operations during the reporting period in some areas of Pul-e Khumri, such as Dand-e Ghori (not to confuse with Dahana-e Ghuri district, also in Baghlan province) in April, July, October and December 2019\textsuperscript{913}, Chashma-e Sher in July 2019\textsuperscript{914} or Dand-e Shahabuddin in October 2019.\textsuperscript{915} A large-scale operation reportedly resulted in the displacement of thousands of families from Dand-e Ghori and Dand-e Shahabuddin areas in October 2019.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{917}

\textsuperscript{904} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pul-e-Khumri Flash Update No.3, 3 September 2019, \url{url}; Tolonews, Highways Remain Closed As Clashes Continue In Baghlan, 2 September 2019, \url{url}; Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e-Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{905} Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, \url{url}, pp. 27-28

\textsuperscript{906} Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians, military personnel among 63 killed in Baghlan clashes, 2 September 2019, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (26 August – 1 September 2019), 4 September 2019, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pul-e-Khumri Flash Update No.3, 3 September 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{907} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s shadow governor among 43 rebels killed in Baghlan, 5 September 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{908} Tolonews, Baghlani Clashes Enter Sixth Day, 6 September 2019, \url{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{url}; Xinhua, Afghan fighting gets intensified amid reported progress in U.S.-Taliban talks, 9 September 2019, \url{url}; Al Jazeera, Trump cancels Taliban talks: What does it mean for Afghanistan?, 8 September 2019, \url{url}; Kabul Press, US Peace Talk with the Taliban Is Talibanzation of Afghanistan, 3 September 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{909} Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{910} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (26 August – 1 September 2019), 4 September 2019, \url{url}; Tolonews, Special Forces Launch Clearance Operations In Baghlan, 4 September 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{911} Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{912} Pajhwok Afghan News, Growing insecurity worries Baghlan shopkeepers, 13 October 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{913} Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan: 371 displaced families in need of urgent assistance, 4 April 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 security personnel killed, 14 injured in Baghlan attack, 3 July 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Massive operations launched against Talibans in Baghlan, 17 October 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 22 rebels eliminated in Helmand, Baghlan operations, 24 December 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{914} Khaama press, Special Forces rescue 2 oil tanker drivers, kill 5 Taliban militants in Baghlan, 18 July 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{915} Pajhwok Afghan News, Massive operations launched against Taliban in Baghlan, 17 October 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{916} Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan IDPs in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, 30 October 2019, \url{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
2.5 Balkh

2.5.1 General description of the province

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, Jowzjan 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. 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.

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. Balkh is an ethnically diverse province. It is inhabited by Pashtun, Uzbek, Hazara, Tajik, Turkmen, Aimaq, Baloch, Arab and Sunni Hazara (Kawshi) communities.

Balkh – and more specifically Mazar-e Sharif – is an import/export hub as well as a regional trading centre. 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 Bamiyan in the centre of Afghanistan is under

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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
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-Staatsdokumentation, 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
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. 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.

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’, including Keshendeh, a district that the New York Times reported to be under Taliban control in December 2019.

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. However, no security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Balkh between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Balkh province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps that has its headquarters in Dehdadi district of the province. 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.

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.

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. 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. Resolute Support recorded between 102 and 150 civilian casualties in the province.
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 Chamtal 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

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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
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: February 2020, 6 February 2020, url
military or police facilities such as checkpoints and bases and on convoys and vehicles. These incidents at times resulted in civilian casualties, as for example in Sawrian village in Charbulak district on 3 August 2019, in the Alamkhel area of Balkh district on 17 March 2020, or in the Maidan Hawai area of Dawlatatabd district on 14 May 2020. Attacks by the Taliban on government officials and employees were also included under armed clashes by ACLED. 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 Jawzjan provinces. Gen. Dostum escaped unhurt, but there were casualties among his entourage. 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.

Operations, such as Operation Walid 40 launched in March 2019, Operation Khalid in April 2019 and Operation Shaheen 611 in April 2020 and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under battles by ACLED. Most of those were carried out in August 2019 and January 2020. 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.

The Taliban attacked security outposts briefly capturing them before they were retaken by security forces in Zari district in March and May 2019 and in Charkent district on 3 July 2019. Afghan officials rejected claims by the Taliban of having captured Zari district in September 2019, stating that


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 28-74, 7 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


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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{984} As a result of an AGE attack on Zari district centre in February 2020 four people were killed and others were injured.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{986} The Taliban claimed to have overthrown Alamkhail, Baba Yousif, and Boka villages of Balkh district at the end of December 2019.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{989} Government officials denied the claim by the Taliban that they had overran the compound.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{991} Coordinated attacks by the Taliban on Dawlatabad, Balkh and Chemtal districts in March 2020 triggered operations by security forces.\textsuperscript{992} Clashes between (pro-)government forces and local jihadi commander forces were also reported in Balkh district in May 2019 and caused civilian casualties.\textsuperscript{993}

Air/drone strikes represented 11\% of all reported violent incidents in Balkh between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{995} While air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs,\textsuperscript{996} and destroyed their facilities or equipment,\textsuperscript{997} 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.\textsuperscript{998} In May 2020, civilians, reportedly forced by the Taliban to

\textsuperscript{983} RFE/RL, Afghan Officials: Taliban Suffers Heavy Casualties In Several Provinces, 22 September 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban claims capturing Zari district in Balkh, 3 September 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{984} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{985} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (17 February – 23 February 2020), 26 February 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{986} Pajhwok Afghan News, 38 local uprising members killed, injured in Zare clash, 1 may 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{987} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{988} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh: District police chief killed in Taliban attack, 6 November 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{989} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{990} AP, Afghan officials: Taliban attack kills at least 11 policemen, 1 October 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{991} Tolonews, 'Vulnerable' Areas in Chamtal Cleared of Taliban: Army, 8 February 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{992} Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh: 2 tanks torched in Dawlatabad firefight, 20 March 2020, \url{url}; Khaama Press, 25 Taliban militants killed, 33 wounded in Balkh clashes, 24 March 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{993} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 dead, 5 injured as Balkh commanders clash, 8 may 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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{url}

\textsuperscript{996} NYT, Dozens Killed as Taliban Bombs in 4 Humvees Rip Through Afghan District, 30 June 2019, \url{url}; Khaama press, 8 Taliban militants killed in an airstrike of the Afghan Air Force in Balkh province, 4 April 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan New, Taliban’s district chiefs, commanders killed in Balkh, 30 June 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Car bomb destroyed; 15 Taliban militants killed in Balkh operations, 17 August 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban chief for Chamtal district killed in airstrike, 7 February 2020, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 16 insurgents killed in Balkh air raid, says army, 5 May 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{997} Khaama Press, 49 Taliban militants killed, wounded; strategic compound destroyed in Balkh, 9 September 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Notorious Taliban commander, his fighters killed in Balkh before disrupting elections, 28 September 2019, \url{url}; Khaama press, Video: Airstrike destroys key Taliban compound in Balkh province, 6 April 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{998} RFE/RL, Afghan Officials Say Four Children, Three Women Killed In Air Strikes, 26 January 2020, \url{url}; NYT, Despite Calm in Afghan Cities, War in Villages Kills Dozens Daily, 29 January 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update
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.

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs – sometimes VB-IEDs or pressure plate IEDs to target security forces or government officials, represented 7% of all reported security incidents in Balkh between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. 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 them, 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.

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.

Eighteen incidents categorised by ACLED as violence against civilians included the killing of off-duty police personnel, the abduction and killing of civilians by the Taliban on 7 April 2020 in Sholgareh district and the killing of civilians in operations by security forces, as reported by the Taliban. These incidents represented 2% of all violent events in Balkh province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. 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.

(27 January – 2 February 2020), 5 February 2020, Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 of a family killed in Balkh airstrike, residents claim, 26 January 2020, NYT

UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January – 30 March 2020, p. 6


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).

NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019.


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).

UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, 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. 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. 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.

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. However, in contrast to other northern provinces, AAN did not observe a telecommunication ban in Balkh. In some districts not all networks were active. The election campaign office of President Ghani was attacked by unidentified gunmen on 1 September 2019. 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.

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. There were reports of increased insecurity along the Mazar-Shiberghan Highway in August 2019. The Taliban reportedly often established checkpoints along the highway, making travelling for government employees difficult. Security incidents along the Mazar-Shiberghan Highway were reported in March, April and October 2019 and continued to be reported in 2020, including during the week of reduction in violence at the end of February 2020 agreed between the Taliban and the United States. 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.

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. 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

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
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
1030 Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh protesters 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]
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]
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. 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.

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. 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. 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. The battle caused residents to flee the neighbourhood, while the two sides were shelling each other. Nearby civilian houses were damaged.

Presidential election day, on 28 September 2019, was a quiet day in Mazar-e Sharif, with little visible security measures an 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.

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. 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.

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. 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 Taliban and from Sholgara, in particular in May 2020 and also in July and August 2019, when security operations were reported. 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. Sikkerhetsituationen 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
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 there\textsuperscript{1056}, 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 day\textsuperscript{1057} and from Shortepa district in January 2020 due to military operations in that district.\textsuperscript{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 district\textsuperscript{1059}, 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1061}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item 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{}
\item ERM (Emergency Response Mechanism), Household Assessment report, 20 October 2019, \url{}
\item UNOCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January – 2 February 2020), 5 February 2020, \url{}
\item Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s influence, insecurity grow in Balkh, 18 August 2019, \url{}
\item UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{}
\item UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{}
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\end{footnotesize}
2.6 Bamyan

2.6.1 General description of the province

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. Bamyan is situated south of the Hindu Kush and north of the Koh-i Baba mountain ranges. 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. 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.

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Bamyan province has a population of 495 557. As Bamyan is part of the Hazarajat region, referred to as the ‘unofficial Hazara capital’ by Al Jazeera, the main ethnic group in the province is Hazara. Other groups present include a minority of Pashtun, UNOCHA.
Tajik, and Sayed/Sadat. 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. Approximately 90% of Bamyan’s residents are Shias.

In March 2016, Kam Air initiated direct commercial flights between Kabul and Bamyan, with flights operating several times a week. 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. Bamyan province is planned to be connected to neighbouring Baghlan province via the Baghlan to Bamyan (B2B) Road in 2022.

Bamyan is reportedly one of Afghanistan’s poorest provinces, ‘[...] often lacking basic facilities and electricity’. Tourism is a source of revenue in the province, which has however been impeded by insecurity in neighbouring provinces, as well as by the increasing Covid-19 crisis in Afghanistan. According to UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018, Bamyan province remained opium-free in 2018. 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).

### 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 province), have been described as relatively safe and less affected by conflict-driven violence. 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. Bamyan’s relative peacefulness has also been attributed to the active involvement of religious leaders in local and governmental peace processes in the province.

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

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1070 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Bamyan Provincial Overview, 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]
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]; National (The), Coronavirus Shatters Tourism Hopes in Afghanistan’s Bamyan Province, 26 April 2020, [url]
1084 UNAMA, Bamyan Religious Scholars Gather to Discuss Peace-Building in Afghanistan, 20 November 2017, [url]
‘government-controlled’ or ‘undetermined’. The provincial capital, Bamyan City, is reported to be under government control. According to an international source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019, the Taliban have no local presence in Bamyan 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. In September 2019, UNOCHA reported on a ‘tense’ situation in Bamyan’s districts Khmard and Shibar due to activities of non-state armed groups. 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 Bamyan province.

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 Bamyan province), ‘given the importance of passing through Jalrez and the risks that this transit entails’. The Kabul-Bamyan Highway, often referred to as the Death Road/Valley, has been reported as unsafe. According to two international sources Landinfo spoke to in October 2019, 10 to 15 kilometres on the Kabul-Bamyan Highway have been controlled by the Taliban for several years.

In December 2019, Qaane reported on 20 kilometres of this highway, connecting the Hazarajat region to the Afghan capital, under Taliban control. Roadblocks/checkpoints and IED emplacement by armed opposition groups have been reported, as well as people being killed, kidnapped (passengers working for the Afghan government, NGOs or international troops) and/or extorted by Taliban militants. The victims were mainly Hazaras travelling on this route between Kabul and the Hazarajat region. 58% of respondents of the Asia Foundation’s 2019 Survey of the Afghan People in Bamyan province reported to experience fear while travelling. 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 Bamyan. Truck drivers transporting agricultural produce and other material between Kabul and the Hazarajat

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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 Bamyan City, August 2019, url, p. 1
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-Bamyan 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
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 Bamyan City of Bamyan 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-Bamyan Highway, 13 September 2019, url
1099 Afghanistan Times, People Ask for Security of Kabul-Bamyan 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-Bamyan 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.\footnote{1104}

No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP have been recorded in Bamyan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED.\footnote{1105}

After the arrest of Hazara militia leader Abdul Ghani Alipur late November 2018, on charges of attacking security forces\footnote{1106}, as well as of extortion of passengers by his gunmen on the highway from Maidan Shar to Jalrez and Bamyan\footnote{1107}, protests were reported in Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif and Bamyan.\footnote{1108} His supporters claimed that Alipur had not been fighting government forces, but rather the Taliban in parts of Wardak, Ghor and Daykundi provinces.\footnote{1109} Shortly after the protests, Alipur was released from NDS custody.\footnote{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.\footnote{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 group\footnote{1112}, 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.’\footnote{1113}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Bamyan is under the responsibility of the 203\textsuperscript{th} 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.\footnote{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.\footnote{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.\footnote{1116} For example in May 2019, three boys were killed in the Dahana-e Ahangaran area, when accidently setting off an old Soviet bomb while playing.\footnote{1117} In March 2020, the UN Secretary General reported Bamyan as the only province to be declared free of landmine

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{1104} Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, \url{[URL]}.
\item \footnote{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{[URL]}.
\item \footnote{1106} Tolonews, Alipoor Says He Is 'Ready to Hand Over All Weapons', 27 November 2018, \url{[URL]}.
\item \footnote{1107} Tolonews, NDS Chief Says Claims Against Alipoor Will Be Investigated, 27 November 2018, \url{[URL]}.
\item \footnote{1108} Tolonews, Alipoor Says He is 'Ready to Hand Over All Weapons', 27 November 2018, \url{[URL]}; RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader after Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, \url{[URL]}.
\item \footnote{1109} Tolonews, Alipoor Supporters Protest for the Second Day in Kabul, 26 November 2018, \url{[URL]}.
\item \footnote{1110} RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader after Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, \url{[URL]}; AP, Afghans Recruited to Fight in Syrian War Struggle Back Home, 1 April 2019, \url{[URL]}.
\item \footnote{1111} ‘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{[URL]}).
\item \footnote{1112} Hamidi, M., The Two Faces of the Fatemiyun (I): Revisiting the Male Fighters, AAN, 8 July 2019, \url{[URL]}.
\item \footnote{1113} USDO, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{[URL]}, p. 14.
\item \footnote{1114} Tolonews, Ghani Orders Formation of New 443-Strong Security Unit in Bamyan Province, 10 November 2018, \url{[URL]}.
\item \footnote{1115} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{[URL]}, p. 94.
\item \footnote{1116} NYT, Afghanistan’s Curse: A Bomb from 2 Wars Ago Crushes a Family Today, 21 November 2019, \url{[URL]}.
\end{itemize}}
contamination, following the work of the only mixed-gender demining team in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{1118} Resolute Support\textsuperscript{1119} 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 data\textsuperscript{1122}](image)

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 \textit{arbakis} (the term \textit{arbaki} is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias).\textsuperscript{1123}

The single incident ACLED registered as ‘violence against civilians’ in Bamyan was coded as an incident of sexual violence in Bamyan City.\textsuperscript{1124} In August 2019, two senior security officials were accused of raping a young woman in the guesthouse of the Bamyan police headquarters.\textsuperscript{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),

\textsuperscript{1119} Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.
\textsuperscript{1120} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 72
\textsuperscript{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{url}
\textsuperscript{1122} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Bamyan, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{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{url}
\textsuperscript{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{url}
reaching almost 50%\footnote{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{url}; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, \url{url}, p. 98} and with a high female turnout reported.\footnote{RFE/RL, Five Takeaways from Afghanistan’s Presidential Election, 28 September 2019, \url{url}} However, across the whole province the 2019 voter turnout remained low compared to previous elections.\footnote{Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, \url{url}} 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.\footnote{Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, \url{url}, p. 62} 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.\footnote{Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, \url{url}} 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.\footnote{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{url}; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, \url{url}} A Taliban checkpoint was established in the border area with Baghlans Tala Wa Barfak district on election day.\footnote{Acled, Acled 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{url}} Without providing further details, Agence France Presse (AFP) reported on security incidents on polling day in Bamyan province.\footnote{Acled, Acled 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{url}} 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.\footnote{Acled, Acled 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{url}}

### 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).\footnote{Acled, Acled 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{url}} 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.\footnote{Acled, Acled 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{url}} 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.\footnote{Acled, Acled 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{url}} According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Bamyan province resided in Bamyan district, followed by
Kahmard district. 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

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.1142 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

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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
1140 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Daykundi Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1141 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Daykundi Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
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. 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. 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. 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. 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).

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.’ UNAMA as well as AAN and several media sources mentioned Nawmesh district as part of Daykundi province in 2019.

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Daykundi province has a population of 516 504. As Daykundi is part of the Hazarajat region, the main ethnic group in the province is Hazara. Other groups present include a minority of Pashtun, Baloch, and Sayed/Sadat. Gizab/Patoo is a mixed Pashtun-Hazara district.

Daykundi is described as having a ‘difficult geography’. Most of the province’s territory is mountainous, with heavy snowfall in winter often blocking roads for months. 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. ‘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
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
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, Sayyd, Sayid, Sayeed) [Query response on Afghanistan: Information on the ethnic group of the Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyd, Sayid, Sayeed)], 25 October 2017, 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 Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, 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. 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.

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. 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’. 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). According to UNODC, 100% of opium-poppy taxes in Daykundi province is collected by anti-government groups.

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. 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.

Mid-July 2019, an increase in Taliban attacks causing a deterioration of the security situation in some of Daykundi’s districts was reported. The situation in the districts of Gizab/Patoo, Ashtarlay and Khadir has been indicated as volatile. Kajran and Nawmesh districts are equally reported among the province’s most insecure areas. In September 2019, UNOCHA reported on a ‘tense’ situation in the districts of Kajran and Patoo due to activities of non-state armed groups. According to an international organisation Landinfo spoke with in October 2019, the Taliban were present in the southern areas of Daykundi.

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. For

1159 Afghanistan FSC, Daykundi Province Fact Findings (Qualitative Assessment) Report, 18 April 2018, p. 3
1160 Tolonews, Daikundi Secure but Lacks Development: Residents, 6 April 2018
1162 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, pp. 10, 11, 17, 19
1164 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018: Challenges to Sustainable Development, Peace and Security, 30 July 2019, p. 64
1165 DW, Afghanistan: ‘A Latent Instability Dominates the Picture’, 14 March 2017, Tolonews, Daikundi Secure but Lacks Development: Residents, 6 April 2018; Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The Outstanding Role of Women, AAN, 27 January 2019; Rottig, T., Spring Offensive and Flooding Since the Afghan New Year, 7 April 2019, An international organisation Landinfo spoke to in October 2019, the Taliban were present in the southern areas of Daykundi.
1171 Pajhwok Afghan News, 2017 Causalities: Nearly 25,000 People Killed, Wounded in Afghanistan, 14 January 2018
1176 Reportedly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi: Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019
1177 ERM, AC301-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Nili District of Daykundi Province, 23 June 2019; AP, 3 Policemen Die in Attacks on Afghan Police Chief, Governor, 21 April 2020
1178 Reportedly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi: Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019
1179 UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (9 - 15 September 2019), 15 September
1180 Norway, Landinfo: Afghanistan: Sikkerhets situasjon og konflikmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020
1181 Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi Residents Concerned About Daesh in Neighborhood, 3 June 2018; Reporterly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi: Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019
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. 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 departments and to a lack of military equipment, often exploited by militant groups. As stated by AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, the creation of Patoo district affected the security situation in the region, as it sowed local discord. 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.

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.

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.

Media sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in Kajran and Patoo 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. In August 2019, civilian protests were reported against increasing violence and Taliban attacks in Kajran and Patoo districts.

Several prominent Taliban figures were reported to have been killed in Kajran district. In July 2019, a well-known Taliban commander called Mullah Noor was killed, together with more than 30 other militants. 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.

According to AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, the roads connecting Daykundi province to Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Herat are not secure. 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.

In December 2019, a pressure-plate IED detonated on the road connecting Daykundi to Ghazni.

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1173 Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 21 July 2020, url
1174 Reporterly, 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 Reporterly, 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 Reporterly, 9 Security Forces Killed & Injured in Taliban Attack in Daikundi, 2 July 2019, url; Reporterly, 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 Reporterly, 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1190}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Daykundi is under the responsibility of the 205\textsuperscript{th} 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1192} Resolute Support\textsuperscript{1193} 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 data\textsuperscript{1196}](url)

\textsuperscript{1189} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 42

\textsuperscript{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{url}

\textsuperscript{1191} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 13

\textsuperscript{1192} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 94

\textsuperscript{1193} Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.

\textsuperscript{1194} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 72

\textsuperscript{1195} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1196} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Daykundi, \url{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).\(^1\) Examples of such incidents include attacks on military or police checkpoints/outposts and bases in Kajran district in June 2019\(^2\), in July 2019\(^3\), in November 2019\(^4\), in December 2019\(^5\) and in March 2020\(^6\); in Nili district in July 2019\(^7\); in Nawmesh district in July 2019\(^8\) and in October 2019\(^9\); in Patoo district in August 2019\(^10\); and in Khadir (Kando) district in March 2020.\(^11\) 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.\(^12\) For example in August 2019\(^13\) and December 2019\(^14\), several Taliban militants were killed and wounded in ANDSF operations in Kajran district. In October 2019\(^15\) and November 2019\(^16\), 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.\(^17\) For example in April 2020, the car of a provincial police chief hit a roadside bomb, causing several ANP casualties.\(^18\) 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.\(^19\)

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.\(^20\)

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\(^1\) 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


\(^3\) Reportedly, 9 Security Forces Killed & Injured in Taliban Attack in Daikundi, 2 July 2019, url


\(^5\) Xinhua, Taliban Shadow District Chiefs Killed in Afghan Provinces, 25 December 2019, url

\(^6\) 1TV, Four Killed in Attack Police Checkpoints in Daikundi, 29 March 2020, url

\(^7\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Security Forces, 6 Rebels Killed in Fresh Offensives, 4 July 2019, url

\(^8\) NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, url

\(^9\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Killed, 7 Wounded in Fresh Wave of Violence, 7 October 2019, url


\(^11\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Police Killed, 8 Injured in Daikundi Clash, 29 March 2020, url

\(^12\) 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

\(^13\) Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Inflict Heavy Casualties on Taliban in Daikundi and Kandahar, 3 August 2019, url

\(^14\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban Killed in Daikundi Operation, 27 December 2019, url

\(^15\) Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 38 Taliban Militants in Daikundi and Wardak, 31 October 2019, url

\(^16\) Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 27 Taliban and ISIS Militants in 6 Provinces, 19 November 2019, url

\(^17\) 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

\(^18\) AP, 3 Policemen Die in Attacks on Afghan Police Chief, Governor, 21 April 2020, url

\(^19\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi Blast: 7 People Killed, 4 Injured, 10 May 2019, url

\(^20\) 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’. 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. 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. In June 2020, 53 civilians were reportedly taken hostage by the Taliban while on their way from Kajran district to Kiti district. Local elders were involved to negotiate the release.

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%, with a high female turnout reported. However, across the whole province the 2019 voter turnout remained low compared to previous elections. In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 26-50% of respondents in Daykundi province reported to have experienced fear while voting. 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. According to AAN, election day in Daykundi province went relatively smoothly. A local journalist and an observer from the Afghanistan Civil Society Forum (ACSFO) indicated insecurity had influenced voting in Kajran, Patoo and Nawamesh districts. Without providing further details, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on election related attacks on polling day in Daykundi province. The polling centre in Buka-e Suf in Kajran district reportedly came under fire and was temporarily closed, no casualties were reported.

### 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

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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](https://www.acled.org)
1219 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Rebels Accused of Looting Food-Laden Trucks, 24 January 2020, [url](https://www.pajhwoknews.com)
1220 However, the Taliban denied their involvement in the hostage-taking. Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on: 20 June 2020, [url](https://twitter.com)
1221 1TV, Taliban Abduct 53 Civilians in Daikundi, 20 June 2020, [url](https://www.1tv.com)
1223 RFE/RL, Five Takeaways from Afghanistan’s Presidential Election, 28 September 2019, [url](https://www.rferl.org)
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](https://www.aan.com)
1225 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](https://asiafoundation.org), p. 62
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](https://www.aan.com)
1228 Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 Killed, 123 Wounded in Election Day Attacks, 28 September 2019, [url](https://www.pajhwoknews.com)
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1232} In July and August 2019, UNOCHA reported on continuing clashes over the strategic control of the Bazar Mushararak area in Kajran district, causing the displacement of large numbers of people to various locations.\textsuperscript{1233} Several villages in the area were reported to be inaccessible due to conflict and mine contamination.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1235}


\textsuperscript{1232} ERM, AC301-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Nili District of Daykundi Province, 23 June 2019, \url{https://www.unocha.org}, p. 1

\textsuperscript{1233} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (29 July - 4 August 2019), 4 August 2019, \url{https://www.unocha.org}, p. 2


\textsuperscript{1235} IOM, Afghanistan - Daykundi Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, \url{https://www.iom.int}, 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{https://www.iom.int}
2.8 Farah

2.8.1 General description of the province

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. Farah province is divided into the following administrative units: Anar Dara, Bakwa, Bala Buluk, Farah, Gulistan, Khak-e Safed, Lash-e Juwayn, Pur Chaman, Pushtrud, Qala-i Kah (formerly Push-t-Koh) and Shib Koh. The provincial capital of Farah is Farah.

Afghanistan NSIA estimated the population of Farah at 563 026 in 2020-21, with 128 047 of its residents living in the provincial capital. The majority of Farah’s inhabitants are Pashtuns, with Tajik and smaller Hazara communities residing mainly in the countryside. Aylat, Mugal, Sadat, Bomodi, Aymaq, Barahawi and Baloch tribes live in Farah, according to Pajhwok Afghan News.

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. Cross-border transport and trade with Iran is reportedly possible at Abu Nasr Farahi port. In September 2018, Tolonews reported security problems near the border crossing, as the route towards

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1236 UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Farah Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1237 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Farah Province District Atlas, April 2014, url
1239 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., url, pp. 5 and 43
1240 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., url, pp. 5 and 43
1241 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Farah Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1242 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Farah, n.d., url
1243 Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url
1244 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. 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.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Farah is one of the main opium poppy-cultivating provinces in western Afghanistan. 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 2017, after opium-poppy cultivation had increased by 41% in 2017 compared to 2016. In 2020, UNODC indicated that ‘some traffickers believed that there might be nearer 20 or 30 [illicit opium manufacturing] laboratories in Farah’. According to AAN, in 2019, opium poppy cultivation in the western provinces including in Farah has decreased by 23% compared to 2018.

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. 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. 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. Another source indicated that Taliban operate in a number of districts of Farah province.

In September 2019, Ariana News cited a local official in Farah province stating that ‘Taliban militants captured the center of Anar Darah district.’ In October 2019, the same source cites the Afghan government indicated the presence of a Taliban prison in Pur Chaman and in September 2019 in Bakwa districts. On 7 January 2020, Afghanistan Times reported that the government claimed having cleared several villages from Taliban presence ‘in outskirts of Farah City and in Bala Buluk and Qal-e-Kah districts’. 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, OAPT update, voice of “Quchaqbar” understanding opiate trafficking in Afghanistan from the presective 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 Ruttiq, 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. 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. In March 2020, Taliban reportedly closed the Farah-Herat Highway. On 10 May 2020, local media reported that former chief police of Farah province joined the Taliban. 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. A local news also reported on the incident.

In terms of government presence, the 207th Zafar Corps is in charge of the ANA operations in the province of Farah. As part of the RS Mission, Italian forces provide ‘functionality-based’ security assistance to ANA 207th Corps and ANP in Farah province.

### 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. According to SIGAR, RS (Resolute Support) recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Farah province during the first quarter of 2020, and the mentioned source recorded the same number of civilian casualties (between 26 and 50) during the second quarter of 2020.

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 data](url)

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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]
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 province\textsuperscript{1273}, including intense fighting in parts of Farah province in June 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 districts;\textsuperscript{1276} on 31 July 2019, between 24\textsuperscript{1277} 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 Kandahar;\textsuperscript{1278} 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 home;\textsuperscript{1279} on 23 November 2019, ten civilians were killed, and five wounded in an air strike in the Gajki village of Pushtrioud district;\textsuperscript{1280} 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’;\textsuperscript{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 Shamalgha areas;\textsuperscript{1282} on 9 February 2020, five civilians, who were reportedly businessmen travelling from Farah City to Abu Nasar Farahi port were killed in an air strike;\textsuperscript{1283} on 12 May 2020, four children were killed by a mortar attack hitting a house in Bala Buluk district.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{1271} Ariana News, Afghan forces retreat from Anar Darah district of Farah province, 7 September 2019, \url{www.ariana-news.com/afghan-forces-retreat-from-anar-darah-district-of-farah-province-7-september-2019}
\textsuperscript{1273} Ariana News, Taliban attacks border police checkpoint in Farah, 2 June 2019, \url{https://ariana-news.com/afghanistan/1701229622.html}
\textsuperscript{1274} Khaama Press, Afghan special forces storm Taliban leadership’s compound in Farah province, 31 May 2019, \url{https://khaama.com/2019/05/31/afghan-special-forces-storm-taliban-leadership-compound-in-farah-province/}
\textsuperscript{1275} Tolonews, Taliban attack pushed back in Farah: officials, 16 June 2019, \url{https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/national/2794946.html}
\textsuperscript{1277} Tolonews, Heavy clashes ongoing in Farah: officials, 6 September 2019, \url{https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/national/2893876.html}
\textsuperscript{1279} NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, \url{https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/28/world/afghanistan/casualty-report.html}
\textsuperscript{1280} Ariana News, Taliban attacks intensified in most parts of Afghanistan recently, 15 June 2020, \url{https://ariana-news.com/afghanistan/1701101041.html}
\textsuperscript{1281} Pajhwok Afghan News, dozens of civilians, forces killed in Farah, 6 May 2019, \url{https://www.pajhwok.com/en/afghanistan/national/4539101-dozens-of-civilians-forces-killed-in-farah.html}
\textsuperscript{1282} UNAMA, protection of civilians in armed conflicts, special report: airstrike on alleged drug-process facilities, 5 May 2019, 9 October 2019, \url{https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/UNAMA_AR2019.pdf}
\textsuperscript{1284} Reuters, Afghanistan highway blast kills at least 34 on bus, injures 17, 31 July 2019, \url{https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-bombing/afghanistan-highway-blast-kills-at-least-34-on-bus-injures-17-idUSKBN20A01O}
\textsuperscript{1286} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, \url{https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/02/world/afghanistan/casualty-report.html}
\textsuperscript{1287} Shia News Association, [unofficial translation] ‘Health Ministry: in the past one year, 50 health centres have been destroyed, 21 January 2020’, \url{http://www.shianews.com/en/2020/01/21/1641054}
\textsuperscript{1289} Tolonews, Farah officials claim civilians were killed in airstrike, 9 February 2020, \url{https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/national/2896190.html}
\textsuperscript{1290} Afghanistan Times, four children killed in Farah mortar attacks, 12 May 2020, \url{https://www.afghanistan-times.com/national-news/afghanistan/1309145874.html}
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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, Pushtrud, Shib Koh, Anardara and Qala-i Kah districts to the surrounding villages of Farah City.\textsuperscript{1287} In August and September 2019, 1,287 people were displaced due to conflict from Bala Buluk, Khak-e Safed, Pur Chaman, Pushtrud, Bakwa, Lash-e Juwayn, Shib Koh, Anardara districts and villages of Farah City.\textsuperscript{1288}

\textsuperscript{1285} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{1286} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{1287} UNOCHA, Farah Operational Coordination Team (OCT) meeting minutes, 25 July 2019, url, p. 1
\textsuperscript{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: UNOCHA

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, Qorgham, Shirintagab. The provincial capital is Maymana. According to UNODC, the district of Ghormach became part of Faryab in 2017. 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. 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. 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). 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.

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. The main ethnic groups in the province are Uzbeks. Other groups present include Tajiks/Aimaqs, Pashtuns, Hazara, Moghol and other smaller ethnicities.

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. According to AAN, parts of the paved highway between Badghis and Faryab have been under Taliban control in the past and in March 2018, the Taliban were threatening parts of the Ring Road, as well as important provincial roads. 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. This impacted civilian movement as well.

As of July 2020, scheduled air passenger services between Maymana and Kabul were provided.

References:

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
1296 NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, url, p. 39
1297 Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taliban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taliban 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
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.  

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.’ In 2018, Faryab was described as ‘one of the most contested provinces in the north-west’ with ‘an astonishingly widespread Taliban presence’.

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 inconsistence of government outreach’ as well as the exploitation of local land and water conflicts and the rearmament of local commanders. According to AAN, fighting broke out between local pro-government militias in early 2018, which further weakened the resistance against AGEs.

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. 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.

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
forces and pro-government militias have however not been able to hold most of the areas after Dostum moved out of Faryab.\footnote{Ali, O., Non-Pashhtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, \url{https://www.aandonline.net/en/news/49921}} 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.\footnote{War on the Rocks, In Afghanistan, Today’s Pro-Government Militias Could Be Tomorrow’s Insurgents, 11 December 2017, \url{https://warontherocks.com/2017/12/tomorrows-insurgents/}}

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.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban control 80pc of Faryab area, says governor, 28 November 2018, \url{https://pajhwoknews.com/en/news/53937}} 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.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban overrun Qaramqol district, 23 November 2019, \url{https://pajhwoknews.com/en/news/54863}} In November 2018, the Taliban retook control of Qaramqol district in November 2019.\footnote{UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/990, 13 September 2019, p. 6; Tolonews, Afghan Forces Recapture Faryab’s Bilcheragh District, 25 June 2019, \url{https://www.tolonews.com/en/news/54853}} In June 2019, Bilchiragh district was recaptured by the ANDSF after having been under Taliban control for over a year.\footnote{NYT, Pajhwo Afghan News, Taliban control 80pc of Faryab area, says governor, 28 November 2018, \url{https://pajhwoknews.com/en/news/54863}} In July 2019, after a year, Afghan security forces managed to retake two strategic locations in the south-eastern outskirts of Maymana City.\footnote{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, 13 June 2019, \url{https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/73/990&Lang=E}} With the exception of the district centre, all areas of Dawlatabad were said to be under Taliban control in August 2019.\footnote{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{https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2019/703&Lang=E}} Much of the area in Almar district was reported to be under Taliban control in October 2019.\footnote{LWI, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url{https://www.lifos.org/report/mapping-taliban-control-in-afghanistan/}} 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.\footnote{LWI, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url{https://www.lifos.org/report/mapping-taliban-control-in-afghanistan/}} 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, Kohistan, 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’.\footnote{UNSW, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/990–5/2019/703, 3 September 2019, p. 6; Tolonews, Afghan Forces Recapture Faryab’s Bilcheragh District, 25 June 2019, \url{https://www.tolonews.com/en/news/54853}}

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.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan Forces Recapture Faryab’s Bilcheragh District, 25 June 2019, \url{https://pajhwoknews.com/en/news/54853}} Besides local Taliban fighters, a small Taliban-affiliated group of the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) was reportedly fighting in Faryab in 2018.\footnote{Afghans Demanded a Fair Election. They Could Be Waiting a While for Results, 13 October 2019, \url{https://warontherocks.com/2019/10/afghans-demanded-a-fair-election-they-could-be-waiting-a-while-for-results/}}

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.\footnote{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{https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/73/990&Lang=E}; Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, \url{https://www.aandonline.net/en/news/53921}} In May 2020, provincial officials expressed concern about ISKP affiliates, recruiting and looking for strengthening its position in Faryab province after the
In terms of the presence of government security forces, Faryab province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps. 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.

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. Throughout 2019 UNAMA ranked Faryab among the five provinces in Afghanistan where civilians were most affected by the armed conflict. 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. 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.

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. 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. 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. 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

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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
1330 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94
1331 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 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
1334 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 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.\textsuperscript{1338}

ACLED coded 73\% of the violent incidents in Faryab province as ‘battles’, mainly ‘armed clashes’\textsuperscript{1340}. The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military\textsuperscript{1341}, police\textsuperscript{1342} or NDS personnel\textsuperscript{1343} and members of pro-government militias\textsuperscript{1344} 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 checkpoints\textsuperscript{1345}, police headquarters\textsuperscript{1346} and bases\textsuperscript{1347} 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.\textsuperscript{1348} Three civilians were wounded and 17 shops were destroyed during a battle following a Taliban attack in Shirintagab district on 7 September 2019.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1350} A woman was killed in a clash following a Taliban attack on a security outpost in Dawlatabad district on 24 March 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1352} On 27 June 2020, mortar shells fired by security forces in

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure11.png}
\caption{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 data.\textsuperscript{1339}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{1339} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Faryab, url
\textsuperscript{1340} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1341} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, url
\textsuperscript{1342} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, url
\textsuperscript{1343} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1344} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1345} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1347} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1348} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 15-21, 22 March 2019, url; NYT, Talibannya Capture About 150 Afghan Soldiers After Chase Into Turkmensia, 17 March 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1349} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1350} Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 killed, 24 wounded in Faryab firefight, 7 September 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1351} Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 killed, 24 wounded in Faryab firefight, 7 September 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1352} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, url
response to a Taliban attack on a military base in Qorghān district hit a house, killing a child and wounding four other civilians.\textsuperscript{1353}

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes.\textsuperscript{1354} Some of these operations were backed by air strikes.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1356}

There were reports of groups of Taliban fighters attacking the centre of Dawlatabad district on 25 May 2019\textsuperscript{1357}, of Kohestan district on 30 May 2019\textsuperscript{1358}, of Shirintagab district on 14 March and 17 August 2019\textsuperscript{1359}, of Bilcheragh district on 4 August 2019\textsuperscript{1360} and of Almar and Qaramqol districts in April 2020\textsuperscript{1361}, 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.\textsuperscript{1362}

During the reporting period there were reports of the Taliban capturing villages and government forces recapturing areas in Pashtunkot district.\textsuperscript{1363} The Taliban temporarily captured Qorghān district at the end of August 2019.\textsuperscript{1364} Clashes in the weeks that followed caused a few hundred people to flee to Andkhoy district.\textsuperscript{1365} Fighting in Almar district in August 2019 resulted in the loss of civilian property and livelihoods.\textsuperscript{1366} The Taliban reportedly captured villages in Khwajasabzposh in September 2019.\textsuperscript{1367} In March 2020, the Taliban tried to overrun Almar district.\textsuperscript{1368}

Air/drone strikes represented 13\% of all reported violent incidents in Faryab between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020\textsuperscript{1369}, while incidents of shelling/artillery/missile attack represented 7\%.\textsuperscript{1370} Nearly half of those types of incidents in Faryab between 1 March 2019 and 20 June 2020 occurred in

\textsuperscript{1353} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020 (updated 2 July 2020), [url]
\textsuperscript{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]
\textsuperscript{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]
\textsuperscript{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]
\textsuperscript{1357} NYT Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{1358} Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 security personnel killed in Faryab attack, 30 May 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{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]
\textsuperscript{1360} NYT Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{1361} NYT Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url]
\textsuperscript{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]
\textsuperscript{1364} Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab’s Qorghān district falls to Taliban: Officials, 28 August 2019, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, Forces re-take control of Faryab’s Qorghān district, 30 August 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{1365} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 September 2019), 25 September 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{1366} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 - 11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{1367} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{1368} NYT, Taliban Attack Afghanistan Amid Growing Coronavirus Threat, 28 March 2020, [url]
\textsuperscript{1369} These do not include air strikes are shelling carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under ‘battles’. For more information on ACLED’s methodology, please consult the introduction.
\textsuperscript{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 AGEs, some also caused civilian casualties. Air strikes in response to a Taliban attack in Garziwan district on 1 September killed at least 12 civilians. A drone strike in Shorcha village of Pashtunkot district on 4 August 2019 killed two brothers and wounded another one. 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. 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. 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 2019 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. 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.

AGEs also used roadside bombs or IEDs, including pressure-plate IEDs, or magnetic bombs to target security forces, at times also causing casualties among civilians. This happened on 10 May 2019 in Dawlatalabad district when children herding their cattle were killed and wounded when they struck an IED 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. Targeting army personnel, the Taliban had planted the device on a public road near an ANA checkpoint. Another child was killed when a roadside bomb exploded in Almar district in April 2020 and seven children were injured when their donkey stepped on a pressure-plate IED in Garziwan district on 8 June 2020.

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. These included the killing of the head of an appeal court, 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; Pajwok Afghan News, Separate Taliban attacks cause 28 civilian casualties, 26 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, 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
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 2019, the rape of two girls by unidentified gunmen in an area under Taliban control in Qaramqol district in May 2019, the killing of women accused of committing immoral acts, the killing of a tribal elder, the killing of an off-duty soldier, the abduction and killing of three civilians, including a former garrison commander, the killing of a family in Andkhoy district and the public hanging of two men having shaved their beards by the Taliban, the killing of two scholars by unknown gunman in Maymana City and the killing of civilians by the Afghan security forces, as reported by the Taliban. The Taliban kidnapped a local journalist on 11 October 2019 in Faryab, releasing him the day after. 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.

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. An American air strike targeted a house used as a shelter by the Taliban. Three civilians were killed as a result.

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. Ahead of the presidential election in September 2019, AGEs closed the road between Maymana City and the districts in Faryab. Clashes between Afghan security forces and the Taliban were reported on election day, 28 September 2019, in six of Faryab’s districts, including Bilcheragh and Qaysar.

In the reporting period security incidents occurred along the highway or roads, such as a Taliban attack on Maymana - Jawzan Highway in Qaramqol district in June 2019. In July 2019 a clearance operation was carried out along the highway in Bilcheragh and Garzwan districts. Passing a zone

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1189 Insecurity Insight, Attacks on health care in Afghanistan, 21 May 2020, url
1190 Pajhwok Afghan News, Gunmen rape 2 sisters in Faryab, family seeks justice, 19 May 2019, url
1192 Reporterly, 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
1193 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture, kill off-duty soldier in Faryab, 7 February 2020, url
1194 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, url
1197 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, url
1198 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
1200 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, url
1202 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, url
1203 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, url
1205 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
1206 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url
1207 NYT, Signs of Ballot-Box Stuffing Add Tension to Afghan Vote Count, 3 October 2019, url
1208 Pajhwok Afghan News, Security personnel, Taliban suffer casualties in Faryab clashes, 30 June 2019, url
1209 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1411} Faryab was one out of six provinces where UNAMA documented the abduction of healthcare workers between 11 March and 23 May 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1417} No conflict-induced displacement was registered by UNOCHA from Maymana during the reporting period.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1419}

\textsuperscript{1410} Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 people suffer casualties in Faryab incidents, 9 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1411} WHO, Afghanistan, Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019 \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1412} UNAMA, Special Report: Attacks On Healthcare During The Covid-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, \url{url}, pp. 9, 20
\textsuperscript{1413} Pajhwok Afghan News, Clashes leave Faryab capital, some districts in darkness, 2 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1414} Tolonews, Ongoing Fighting In Six Districts of Faryab: Residents, 10 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1416} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 14 June 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1417} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1418} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 14 June 2020, \url{url}
2.10 Ghazni

2.10.1 General description of the province

**Map 10: Afghanistan – Ghazni province, source: UNOCHA**

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.\textsuperscript{1421} The district of Andar is also known as Shelgar.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1423} Ghazni is inhabited by Pashtuns (49%), Hazara (46%), Tajiks (5%), and other smaller minorities. Three districts – Jaghuri, 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 Paktia’s capital Gardez forks a bit north of Ghazni City. Hence, control over Ghazni is of strategic importance.\textsuperscript{1426}

According to the UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Ghazni province decreased by 67% in 2019, compared to 2018.\textsuperscript{1427}

\subsection*{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 203\textsuperscript{rd} ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.\textsuperscript{1428} The main military base in the province is called Camp Sultan.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1432}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{1421} Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, url, p. 20
\textsuperscript{1422} Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., Uprising, ALP and Taleban in Andar: The arc of government failure, AAN, 22 May 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1423} Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, url, p. 29
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{1426} Clearance Jobs, Taliban Seizure of Ghazi City Returns Terror Organization to its Roots, 13 August 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1427} Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, url
\textsuperscript{1428} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, url, p. 14
\textsuperscript{1429} Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, url
\textsuperscript{1430} Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, url
\textsuperscript{1431} Muzhary F., One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazi province, AAN, 13 June 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1432} Clark, K., The Afghan Territorial Force: Learning from the lessons of the past?, AAN, 15 January 2019, url
\end{flushleft}
The Taliban had ‘long-established significant influence’ in the province and dominated militarily\textsuperscript{1433} with the provincial capital remaining an exception.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1435}

In the spring of 2019, ANA reportedly managed to recapture administrative centres in Deh Yak and Khwajah Omari districts.\textsuperscript{1436} In September 2019, government sources reported that ANA managed to recapture also Jaghato, Malistan, Jaghori, Ajristan and Nawur districts.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.’\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1441}

\textsuperscript{1437} Muzhary F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, \url{https://afranews.org/en/muzhary-f-unheeded-warnings-2-ghazni-city-as-vulnerable-to-taliban-as-before/}
\textsuperscript{1441} Kabul Now, Taliban force people to pay extortion money, Ghazni councilman confirms, 9 October 2019, \url{https://kabulnow.com/national/news/49093/taliban-force-people-to-pay-extortion-money-ghazni-councilman-confirms.html}
\textsuperscript{1443} Khamaa Press, Over 100 Taliban militants during a 16-day operation in Ghazni province, 11 May 2020, \url{https://www.khamaa.com/en/16916/}
\textsuperscript{1444} Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, \url{https://www.stripes.com/2020-02-09-taliban-rise-in-afghanistan-conflict-threatens-civilians-1203831961.html}
According to UNOCHA, Highway One was partially destroyed and contaminated with IEDs in August 2018.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1446}

UNAMA documented also ISKP activity in Ghazni province which caused civilian casualties.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1452}

\textsuperscript{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{url}

\textsuperscript{1443} Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 months on, Ghazni-Paktika road remains shut 3 November 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1444} Kabul Now, Taliban force people to pay extortion money, Ghazni councilman confirms, 9 October 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1445} Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1446} Khamaa Press, Over 100 Taliban militants during a 16-day operation in Ghazni province, 11 May 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1447} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 36

\textsuperscript{1448} LWJ, Taliban supplies al Qaeda with explosives for attacks in major Afghan cities, 16 September 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1449} Jamestown Foundation, Al-Qaeda’s South Asian Branch Gravitating Toward Kashmir, 17 April 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1450} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 94

\textsuperscript{1451} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 72

\textsuperscript{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{url}
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. 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. During clashes in 2019, the roads became impossible to use.

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. Additionally, several health facilities in Ghazni province were damaged either due to conflict or natural disaster.

The Taliban checkpoints along main roads in Ghazni province made travelling insecure, especially for government employees and university students. 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. 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. 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.

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.

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...’
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.\textsuperscript{1464} According to Afghan military sources, in case of clashes in populated areas, the risk of civilian causalities grew as the use of artillery and air strikes were the only effective weapon of ANA against Taliban forces.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1467} According to ACLED, in June 2019, Afghan forces started shooting at people who refused to show their ID cards, killing one person.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 Kahn in Farah province. No conflict-induced internal displacement to Ghazni province from other provinces was reported by UNOCHA in the reporting period.\textsuperscript{1474}

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\textsuperscript{1464} Muzhary F., One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province, AAN, 13 June 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1465} Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, \url{url}; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, February 2020, \url{url}, p. 71

\textsuperscript{1466} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 71

\textsuperscript{1467} JUH/AADA, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Ghazni Province, Humanitarian Response, 01 December 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{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{url}

\textsuperscript{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{url}

\textsuperscript{1470} Tolonews, 1 Protestor Killed as Ghazni Protest Turns Violent 28 April 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1471} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 48

\textsuperscript{1472} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1473} Humanitarian Response, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Ghazni Province, 01 December 2019, \url{url} p. 20

\textsuperscript{1474} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}
2.11 Ghor

2.11.1 General description of the province

Map 11: Afghanistan – Ghor province, source: UNOCHA

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, Bamyan 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 Sarjangal, Pasaband, Saghar, Shahrak, Taywara, and Tulak. The provincial capital is Chaghcharan. 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. Afghanistan, NSIA referred to Chaghcharan as the provincial capital of Ghor in June 2020. Afghanistan, NSIA estimated the population of Ghor at 764,472 in 2019/20. 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 Uzbeks; RFE/RL stated that Aimaqs constitute the majority of Ghor. The Aimaqs are ‘losely related to the Hazara, and to some degree the Tajiks’ according to the US Naval Postgraduate School.

1475 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Ghor Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1477 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., url, P. 33
1478 RTA article published at Baztab news portal, Ghor province, 11 July 2018, url
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1484} According to AAN, in 2019, opium-poppy cultivation in the western provinces including in Ghor has decreased by 23\% compared to 2018.\textsuperscript{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 [...]’\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1487} During the period of 2017 and 2018, the absence of rule of law and government was allegedly a particular pressing problem in Ghor.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{ushr} taxes, respectively a leadership dispute between the former Hezb-i-Islami commander and Taliban insurgents.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1483} UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, \texttt{url}, p. 17
\item \textsuperscript{1484} UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, \texttt{url}, p. 33
\item \textsuperscript{1485} AAN, New world drug report: opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, 25 June 2020, \texttt{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1486} Rutting, T., The ‘Humvee Bomb’ Series: The October wave of Taliban attacks in 2017 context, AAN, 7 November 2017, \texttt{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1487} Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, \texttt{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1488} NYT, Seesaw Conflict With Taliban Takes Toll in Fallen Afghan District, 7 August 2017, \texttt{url}; NYT, No Justice, ‘No Value’ for Women in a Lawless Afghan Province, 7 July 2017, \texttt{url}; IWPR, Afghanistan: Women Abused in Lawless Ghor, 24 July 2018, \texttt{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1489} Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, \texttt{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1490} Rutting, T., A Matter of Registration: Factional tensions in Hezb-e Islami, AAN, 25 November 2017, \texttt{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1491} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill HIA commander’s sons in Ghor clash, 13 January 2018, \texttt{url}
\end{itemize}
of Ghor province. Taliban claimed that in 2019 they took the control of Charsada district centre of Ghor province.

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. According to Kabul Now (local media), in February 2020, the Taliban maintained full control in many Ghor districts. 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. According to information by LWJ collected and presented in a map, Charsada, Dawlat Yar, Taywara, Pasaband and Tulak districts of Ghor province were contested.

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.

In May 2020, the UN Security Council indicated that the Taliban shadow governor for Ghor was Mawlawi Abdul Qayum Rohani Noorzai. In June 2020, Afghanistan Times cited Fakhruddin, police chief of Pasaband district, stating that the deputy governor of Taliban for Ghor province was Mullah Ahmadshahi, who entered Pasaband district with the Taliban shadow governor and over 200 militants on motorbikes. In June 2020, another source mentioned two names ‘Mustafa and Mikhail’ as Taliban high ranking commanders for Ghor province.

The ANSF conducted military operations in Ghor in 2018. According to a report of January 2019, the newly established ANA TF will be stationed ‘soon’ in several districts of Ghor. The 207th Zafar Corps is in charge of ANA operations in the province of Ghor. 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.

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1492 Etlaatroz, هبررسینوضاعنامنیترنغربنکشور؛نازنافزایشنتحرکاتنطالباننتانتلفاتنسنگی  نایننگرو [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, اد تبر کاللهدختانه ته خغنده 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, 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
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, p. 59
1506 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, url
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. According to SIGAR, RS (Resolute Support) recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Ghor province during the first quarter of 2020, and the mentioned source recorded between 51 and 75 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020.

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.

![Graph](image)

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 data.

In 2019, violent conflict and lack of security in several remote districts of Ghor province was reported. Tolonews quoted Rahila Rahmanzada, women rights activist, stating that there were 113 cases of violence against women including stoning during kangaroo courts in Ghor province as of 21 December 2019. 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. 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.

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
tribal leader and two others\textsuperscript{1517}; 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 district\textsuperscript{1518}; on 8 July 2019, six children were killed in an explosion\textsuperscript{1519}; on 23 July 2019, one civilian was killed when a roadside bomb, placed close to the district council compound in Dawlatyar district, exploded\textsuperscript{1520}; 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)\textsuperscript{1521}; on 24 August 2019, two civilians were reportedly killed in a roadside bomb in the same area\textsuperscript{1522}; on 1 September 2019, four civilians were killed, and seven were wounded when multiple bombs detonated in Firozkoh City\textsuperscript{1523}; on 25 September 2019, a roadside bomb explosion killed one civilian and wounded another one in Firozkoh district\textsuperscript{1524}; 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 driver\textsuperscript{1525}; on 13 October 2019, a roadside bomb, which exploded near a vehicle in the village of Band-e Bayan in Lal Wa Sarjangal district, killed two women who were moving to Herat province.\textsuperscript{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 district\textsuperscript{1527}; 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 Firozkoh\textsuperscript{1528}; on 29 May 2020, one child was killed and another was injured in a bomb blast in Pozalich village of Firozkoh, the provincial capital\textsuperscript{1529}; 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 others\textsuperscript{1530}; 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 children\textsuperscript{1531}; 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1534}

\textsuperscript{1517} Tolonews, several killed in Taliban attack in Ghor: Officials, 8 June 2019, [url](https://www.tolonews.com/news/afghanistan/ghor/several-killed-in-taliban-attack-in-ghor-officials-8-june-2019)

\textsuperscript{1518} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-4 July, 4 July 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/04/world/asia/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)


\textsuperscript{1525} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/31/world/asia/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

\textsuperscript{1526} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/31/world/asia/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

\textsuperscript{1527} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/31/world/asia/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

\textsuperscript{1528} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/02/world/asia/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

\textsuperscript{1529} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/02/world/asia/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

\textsuperscript{1530} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/02/world/asia/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

\textsuperscript{1531} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/02/world/asia/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

\textsuperscript{1532} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/02/world/asia/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)


During the period of 28 April – 4 May 2020, the ongoing conflict displaced 400 families (around 2,800 individuals) in Badghis and Ghor provinces. 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.

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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: UNOCHA]

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, Ghur, 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.\textsuperscript{1538} Helmand is the largest province of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{1538} It is divided into the into the following administrative units: Nad Ali, Nawa-e-Barikzayi (Nawa), Nahr-e-Saraj (Gereskh/Grishk), Washer, Garm Ser, Nawzad, Sangin, Musa Qala, Kajaki, Reg-e-Khan Nishin (Reg), Baghran, Dishu, Lashkargah, Marja (formerly part of Nad-e-Ali), and Nawamish. The provincial capital of Helmand is Lashkargah.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1543} The majority of Helmand’s residents are reportedly Pashtuns, with a Baloch minority in the south at the border to the Punjabi province Balochistan\textsuperscript{1544} and with some Hazara minority in the north.\textsuperscript{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, Alikozai, and several smaller tribes. The Ishaqzai are allegedly ‘[…] one of the most religiously conservative tribes across Afghanistan’\textsuperscript{1546}, with the late Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur belonging to this tribe.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1549}

The province has a ‘significant geo-strategic importance’.\textsuperscript{1550} A section of the Ring Road runs through the districts of Nahr-e-Saraj, Sangin and Washer,\textsuperscript{1551} connecting major population centre Herat in the west with Kandahar in the east and eventually the capital Kabul.\textsuperscript{1552} However, according to Tolonews, as of January 2020, the five districts in Helmand province had no road access due to Taliban presence.\textsuperscript{1553} A domestic airport with scheduled passenger service reportedly exists in Helmand’s capital Lashkargah.\textsuperscript{1554}

\textsuperscript{1538} Pajhwok Afghan News, Recognition of southern Helmand province, n.d., \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1539} Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1540} Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1541} Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020, \url{url}, p. 40
\textsuperscript{1542} Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1543} Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, \url{url}, pp. 7, 40
\textsuperscript{1544} Naval Postgraduate School, Helmand Provincial Overview, n.d., \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1545} Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1546} Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1547} Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, \url{url}; Guardian (The), Why capturing Helmand is top of the Taliban’s strategic goals, 26 December 2015, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1548} Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1549} Malkesian, C., War Comes to Garmser: Thirty Years of Conflict on the Afghan Frontier, 2013, p. 266
\textsuperscript{1550} Pajhwok Afghan News, Recognition of southern Helmand province, n.d., \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1551} Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1552} Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, \url{url}; Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1553} Tolonews, Efforts Underway to Clear 5 Helmand Districts of Insurgents, 10 January 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{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 Afghanskans 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 Taliban’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, p. 14
1559 Tolonews, Efforts Underway to Clear 5 Helmand Districts of Insurgents, 10 January 2020, url
1556 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
1556 Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 11 January 2019, url
meaningful rise in trade but some personal freedoms were limited. Soon the provincial capital Lashkargah also became surrounded and on the brink of collapse.

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.

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.

In December 2019, Tolonews reported that the government forces managed to recapture Marja district after four years.

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.’

As a consequence of US-Taliban agreement signed in February 2020, US troops started leaving the military base in Lashkargah in March 2020. 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.

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.

According to the news magazine The Diplomat, as of September 2018, there has been no known presence of Islamic State (IS) fighters in Helmand.

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. Resolute Support recorded between 76 and 100 civilian casualties in Helmand in the first

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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 province, 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 data](image)

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,
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. 7481 persons were displaced within the province itself from different localities mainly to Lashkargah and Washer district. 1752 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

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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
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
2.13 Herat

2.13.1 General description of the province

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. 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 Zargarhun, Shindand, Zinda Jan. Additionally, there are four ‘temporary’ districts – Poshtko, Koh-e Zore (Koh-e Zawar), Zawol, and Zer Koh. The provincial capital of Herat is the city of Herat. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Herat is one of the largest provinces of Afghanistan.

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. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazara, Turkmen, Uzbeks and Aimaq are the main ethnic groups in the province, with Pashtuns representing the majority in 11 border districts. 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.’ 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
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. The province is connected to other major cities by the Ring Road. A primary road leads from Herat eastwards to Ghor and Bamyan and on to Kabul. 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. According Railway Gazette, Herat will be connected to Iran through a railway, which was under construction during the reporting period. 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. 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.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Herat was not one of the ten main opium-poppy cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018. 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. According to AAN, in 2019, opium-poppy cultivation in the western provinces including in Herat has decreased by 23% compared to 2018.

### 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.’ 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.’ In December 2019, Etilaatroz reported on widespread presence of Taliban fighters in a number of districts of Herat province. 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...’

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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 شهرزادان هرات؛ نماینده‌گان 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.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{1626}

According to the UN Security Council report, the Taliban shadow governor for Herat was Mawlawi Abdul Rashid in May 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1628}

In terms of government presence, the 207\textsuperscript{th} Zafar Corps is in charge of the ANA operations in the province of Herat.\textsuperscript{1629} As part of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, Italian forces provide ‘functionality-based’ security assistance to ANA 207\textsuperscript{th} Corps and ANP in Herat province.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1634}

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\textsuperscript{1624} Etilaatroz, بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبانتا تلفات سنتگان 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

\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{1626} Stripes, Airstrike in western Afghanistan kills leader of Taliban splinter group, may have killed civilians, 9 January 2020, url

\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{1628} Tolonews, “Key” Taliban member arrested in Herat by NDS, 23 May 2020, url

\textsuperscript{1629} Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., url; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, url, p. 59

\textsuperscript{1630} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, url, p. 14

\textsuperscript{1631} Radio Azadi, فرمانده پولیس هرات: افزایش نیروهای پولیس افغانستان تبدیل اقتصاد هرات فلج می‌سازد, [informal translation: ‘Herat Police commander: if the number of police personnel does not increase, economy of Herat will be impacted’], 17 December 2019, url

\textsuperscript{1632} Pajhwok Afghan News, Worsening insecurity worries Herat residents, 19 December 2019, url

\textsuperscript{1633} Etilaatroz, بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبانتا تلفات سنتگان 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

\textsuperscript{1634} Pajhwok Afghan News, امر حؤزه دهم امنیتی پولیس هرات به دلیل غفلت وظیفه برعکس 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. According to SIGAR, RS (Resolute Support) recorded between 51 and 75 civilian casualties in Herat province during the first quarter of 2020, and the mentioned source recorded between 101 and 125 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020.

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.

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. There is reportedly rising insecurity on the Islam Qala-Herat Highway. 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.’

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.’ 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.

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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, [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, [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 City; 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 Chahardarah village of Koshk-e Robatsangi district; on 28 September 2019, one civilian was killed, and two others were wounded in a Taliban attack on a polling centre in Obe district; on 29 September 2019, two separate roadside bombs killed two civilians in Golran district; 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 civilians; on 2 October 2019, two police officers and one civilian were killed in a Taliban attack on the centre of Farsi district, 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 district; 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 district; 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 district; 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 others; on 7 November 2019, the Taliban killed one civilian in the Pal Pada village of Pashton Zarghun district; on 31 December 2019, one civilian was killed and another injured by a roadside bomb in Golran district; 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 men, 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. According to AAN, different sources including oral ones reported different numbers of civilian casualties during the mentioned incident; 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’; 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’; 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 district; 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 district; on 18 May 2020, one civilian was killed in Khwaja Nooh village of Shindand district after the Taliban

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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, [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 convoy; 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 district; 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 ANSF; 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 district; 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 Pashtoon Zarghun district.

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.

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.

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. According to Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR), more than 17 000 IDPs families we living in Herat province in February 2020, 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.
2.14 Jawzjan

2.14.1 General description of the province

Map 14: Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, source: UNOCHA

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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, Khanaq, Khwajadukoh, Mardyjan, 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
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, Jawzjan, 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
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.\textsuperscript{1698} Subsequently, the Taliban were able to expand their control in Jawzjan as well as in other provinces of northern Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{1699} 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1691}

IMU, which appeared to have started infiltrating Jawzjan in early 2015 from neighbouring Faryab province according to RFE/RL\textsuperscript{1692}, 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1695} A study on IS presence in Afghanistan published in 2017 supported this finding.\textsuperscript{1696}

According to AAN, Hekmat’s shift to ‘IS’ was rather driven by ‘[…] power-saving opportunism […]’ than by ideological motives.\textsuperscript{1697} The self-proclaimed IS group managed to hold control over the districts of Qushtepa and Darzab for three years, fighting the Taliban\textsuperscript{1698} – though not expanding its territory due to the widespread Taliban presence in the province\textsuperscript{1699} – and initially outlasting the death of its founder by a US drone strike in April 2018.\textsuperscript{1700} In August 2018, the Taliban overran the group’s strongholds,\textsuperscript{1701} 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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{1688} Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, url
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{1690} Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1691} Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, url
\textsuperscript{1692} RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{1694} Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1695} Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, url, pp. 28-29
\textsuperscript{1696} Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1697} 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
\textsuperscript{1698} Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, url
\textsuperscript{1699} 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, p. 15
\textsuperscript{1700} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 85
\textsuperscript{1701} 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.\textsuperscript{1703} No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Jawzjan province between 1 March 2019 and 20 June 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1705} Darzab district was reported to be under Taliban control in March 2019.\textsuperscript{1706} There were reports of the Taliban capturing Qushtepa district in July 2019\textsuperscript{1707} and again during the presidential elections at the end of September 2019.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1709} In the months that followed media reports, adding Aqcha and Khanaqa districts, also reflected this threat on those districts.\textsuperscript{1710} The Taliban took control of Darzab district on 31 December 2019.\textsuperscript{1711} The Afghan security forces reportedly withdrew peacefully from their Antan Hill military base on demand of the local residents.\textsuperscript{1712} Although officials claimed that government forces had retaken Khamyab district in April 2020,\textsuperscript{1713} in its assessment, consulted on 11 June 2020, LWJ continued to indicate the district as ‘Taliban-controlled’.\textsuperscript{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’, Mardyjan, Mingajik and Shiberghan districts as ‘government-controlled’ and the remaining districts in Jawzjan province as ‘contested’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1716} The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan was said to have no more than 100 members and operates mainly in

\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{1704} 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
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{1706} Tolonews, Over 3,700 Militants Killed In 88 Operations In North: Official: Official, 19 March 2019, url
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{1709} Pajhwok Afghan News, ‘123 groups fight government forces under Taliban leadership in Jawzjan’, 3 August 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1710} Tolonews, 11 Police Killed/Wounded In Bakh, 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
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{1712} Khaama Press, Taliban takes over Darzab district of northern Jawzjan province, 31 December 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1713} Khaama Press, Taliban militants killed, 17 wounded in the operation ‘Retake of Khamraab’, 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 Jawzjan’s Khomaab 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
\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{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.\footnote{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{url}, p. 18}

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.\footnote{USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, \url{url}, pp. 11-12, p. 50; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 14}

\subsection*{2.14.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population}

\subsubsection*{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.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 94. No UNAMA data on civilian casualties in Jawzjan province were available for the first half of 2020.} 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.\footnote{SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 72}

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.\footnote{SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 72}

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.\footnote{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{url}} The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS

![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 data]
personnel\textsuperscript{1724}, and members of pro-government militias or local uprising forces\textsuperscript{1725} or attacks on their facilities such as checkpoints\textsuperscript{1726}, headquarters\textsuperscript{1727} and military bases\textsuperscript{1728}, and to a lesser extent on convoys and vehicles.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1730} In Quothepa 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.\textsuperscript{1731} Two civilians were injured in a Taliban attack on a village in Aqcha district in May 2020.\textsuperscript{1732}

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, such as in Fayzabad district in March 2019\textsuperscript{1733} or in Qarqin district in July 2019\textsuperscript{1734}, were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.\textsuperscript{1735}

There were reports of groups of Taliban fighters attacking the centre of Mangajik district on 29 November 2019 and April 2020\textsuperscript{1736}, or Qarqin district on 30 May, 13 July and 10 August 2019 and 30 March 2020\textsuperscript{1737} and Mardyan district at the end of March 2020.\textsuperscript{1738} Some of these attacks resulted into hour-long clashes.\textsuperscript{1739}

Air/drone strikes represented 15\% of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Jawzjan between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.\textsuperscript{1740} Most air strikes were carried out by Afghan forces, while a few

\textsuperscript{1724} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-July 4, 4 July 2019, \url{url}; NYT, War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, \url{url}

NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, \url{url}; Xinhua, 13 killed in N. Afghanistan clashes, including pro-gov't local leader, 4 February 2020, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Gen. Dostum reacts to killing of uprising commander in Taliban militants ambush in Jawzjan, 7 April 2019, \url{url}


\textsuperscript{1725} Bakhtar News, Terrorists With Two Commanders Killed in Jawzjan Clash, 4 December 2019, \url{url}


\textsuperscript{1727} 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{url}

\textsuperscript{1728} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1729} Pajhwok Afghan News, Over 180 killed in deadliest week of current year, 1 June 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1730} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1731} Xinhua, Over 40 including 3 civilians killed within one day in Afghan fighting, 4 March 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Up to 50 militants killed in Afghan Special Forces operations, airstrikes, 6 March 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1732} Khaama Press, Dadullah alias Surkhabi, one of the most dangerous leaders of Taliban killed in Jawzjan, 17 July 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1733} 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{url}

\textsuperscript{1734} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1735} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s Red Unit loses 7 men in Jawzjan firefight, 28 March 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1736} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 9-15, 15 August 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1737} 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.\textsuperscript{1741} While air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs\textsuperscript{1742}, in one reported incident on 20 May 2020, six civilians were also killed when Afghan forces bombarded houses in response to a Taliban attack in Mardyan district.\textsuperscript{1743}

AGEs also used roadside bombs or IEDs, including VB-IEDs\textsuperscript{1744}, to target security forces, at times also causing casualties among civilians.\textsuperscript{1745} This happened on 31 October 2019 when explosives transported by the Taliban, went off prematurely in Mardyan district.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1747} One child was killed and two were wounded when a bomb exploded at an abandoned check point in Dazab district on 7 February 2020\textsuperscript{1748} and one child was killed and two were wounded when two roadside bombs exploded in Mangajik district on 27 June 2020.\textsuperscript{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 2020\textsuperscript{1750}, arson in several shops and schools by AGEs in Dazab district in November 2019, injuring civilians\textsuperscript{1751}, the killing of a child by the Taliban in Qushtepa district in March 2019\textsuperscript{1752}, 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 2019\textsuperscript{1753} 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.\textsuperscript{1754} The men were released after two days.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1758} Attacks by the Taliban were reported on

\textsuperscript{1741} 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{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}


\textsuperscript{1744} Pajhwok Afghan News, Security personnel among 14 killed in Jawzjan incidents, 28 December 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1745} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Jawzjan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}; Khaama Press, Taliban’s IED expert blown up by own bomb in Jawzjan province, 29 June 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1746} Khaama Press, 31 Taliban militants, civilians killed, wounded as explosives-laden vehicle goes off in Jawzjan, 31 October 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1747} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1748} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1749} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1750} Voice of Jihad, Tribal elder martyred, another one injured in enemy aggression, 21 February 2020, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1751} TV, Civilians injured after militants torch schools, shops in Jawzjan: official, 16 November 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}; Bakhtar News, Taliban Sustained Casualties in Jawzjan Operation, 17 November 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1752} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 1-7, 7 March 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}; Khaama Press, 8-year-old child shot dead by Taliban militants in Jawzjan province, 7 March 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1753} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 1-7, 7 March 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1754} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban abduct 40 elderly men from Jawzjan funeral, 10 December 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1755} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban set free 40 elderly individuals in Jawzjan, 12 December 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1756} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1757} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban torch Salaam Telecom tower in Jawzjan, 7 September 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}

\textsuperscript{1758} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, \url{https://led本网站无法解析超链接}
presidential election day, 28 September 2019, in Fayzabad district. A woman was injured as a result of one of those incidents.\textsuperscript{1759}

In August 2019, increased insecurity was reported along the highway between Mazar-e Sharif and Shiberghan.\textsuperscript{1760} Security incidents along the Balkh-Jawzjan Highway occurred in October 2019\textsuperscript{1761} and in February 2020\textsuperscript{1762} and also on the highway connecting Sar-e Pul to Jawzjan in March and August 2019 and in February, March and June 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1767}

\subsection{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1769} No conflict-induced displacement was registered by UNOCHA from Shiberghan during the reporting period.\textsuperscript{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 \%.\textsuperscript{1771}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1759} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, \url{http://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/04/world/asia/afghanistan-war-casualties.html}.
\item \textsuperscript{1761} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, \url{http://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/04/world/asia/afghanistan-war-casualties.html}.
\item \textsuperscript{1764} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, \url{http://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/08/world/asia/afghanistan-war-casualties.html}.
\item \textsuperscript{1766} WHO, Afghanistan: Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019, \url{https://www.who.int/countries/afg/en/}.
\item \textsuperscript{1767} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{https://www.unama.org/sites/default/files/UNAMA_APCAC_2019_EN.pdf}.
\item \textsuperscript{1768} Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 Taliban, 6 security forces perish in Jawzjan battle, 1 July 2019, \url{https://pajhwokafghan.com/news/30-taliban-6-security-forces-perish-in-jawzjan-battle/17016/}.
\item \textsuperscript{1769} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture Jawzjan’s Qush Tepa district, 2 June 2019, \url{https://pajhwokafghan.com/news/taliban-capture-jawzjans-qush-tepa-district/16696/}.
\item \textsuperscript{1770} Khaama Press, Taliban militans suffer heavy casualties in Jawzjan province, 30 June 2020, \url{https://khaama.com/2020/06/30/taliban-militants-suffer-heavy-casualties-in-jawzjan-province/}.
\item \textsuperscript{1771} Khaama Press, Taliban militants suffer heavy casualties in Jawzjan province, 30 June 2020, \url{https://khaama.com/2020/06/30/taliban-militants-suffer-heavy-casualties-in-jawzjan-province/}.
\end{itemize}
2.15 Kabul province

2.15.1 General description of the province

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. More than half of the province consists of mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain. 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.

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. According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Kabul province has a population of 5 204 667. Kabul province has the largest share of population of any province, an estimated 16% of the national total.


Foschini, F., Elections 2014 (6): Two Types of Security in the Shomali, AAN, 7 April 2014, url

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. The main ethnic groups in Kabul are Tajik, Pashtun and Hazara. 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.

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. Kabul City hosts an airport served by international and domestic scheduled passenger flights.

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. According to UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018, opium-poppy cultivation in Kabul province was limited to the Uzbin Valley of Surobi district. 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. According to the July 2019 Quarterly Update from SIGAR, the provinces of Kabul and Nangarhar recorded most cases related to drug smuggling and trafficking. 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. In February 2020, the Kabul counter-narcotics police chief was arrested for extortion, distributing drugs and collusion with drug smugglers.

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. 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-
controlled’ or ‘undetermined’. As confirmed by USDOD and SIGAR, the capital, Kabul City, has remained under the control of the Afghan government.

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. The district has a significant strategic relevance because of its proximity to Kabul City and the Salang Highway. 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].

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. In March 2019, two Taliban militants, reportedly planning a suicide attack in the district, were arrested during an NDS operation. 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. 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.

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’.

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.

ISKP is reported as active and capable of carrying out attacks in Kabul, as well as to have caused civilian casualties in the province in 2019. However, due to continued ANDSF pressure to disrupt its...
activities, the militant group exhibited a reduced capacity to carry out high-profile attacks in Kabul in 2019. 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 resurgence, although reviving the groups networks would probably need time. 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). In February 2020, ISKP reportedly fired missiles on a US military base in Bagrami district, no casualties were recorded. In the same district in August 2019, two ISKP militants were reportedly killed in an ANDSF operation. 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 Paghmnan district in November 2019. 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 leader, were reportedly arrested and killed.

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. According to USDO, about 10% of US’ and Afghan Forces’ operations in 2019 focused on the Kabul region, preventing high-profile attacks. The Special Mission Wing (SMW), an ANDSF unit established in 2012, has several assault squadrons in Kabul to conduct counterterrorism and security operations.

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1804 Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#); 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
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 USDO, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url](#), p. 13
counternarcotic missions.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1818} Compared to 2018, UNAMA listed Kabul as the second province with the largest increase in civilian casualties (+130) from ground engagements in 2019.\textsuperscript{1819} According to UNAMA, civilians living in Kabul province were most directly impacted by the conflict in 2019\textsuperscript{1820}, 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1822} 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1824} Kabul witnessed the highest reported number of security incidents on record in July 2019.\textsuperscript{1825}

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\textsuperscript{1816} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 122; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 75
\textsuperscript{1817} Clark, K., CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitaries Accused of Grave Abuses: New Human Rights Watch Report, AAN, 31 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1818} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 94
\textsuperscript{1819} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 119
\textsuperscript{1820} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2019, April 2019, \url{url}, p. 2; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2019, 30 July 2019, \url{url}, p. 3; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Third Quarter Report: 1 January to 30 September 2019, October 2019, \url{url}, pp. 1-2
\textsuperscript{1821} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2020: 1 January - 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 5
\textsuperscript{1822} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, pp. 69-70
\textsuperscript{1823} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{url}, pp. 71-72
\textsuperscript{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{url}
\textsuperscript{1825} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (29 July - 04 August 2019), 4 August 2019, \url{url}, p. 2
EASO COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION REPORT: AFGHANISTAN - SECURITY SITUATION

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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 data.1826

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

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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];
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];
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];
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).\textsuperscript{1836} In June 2020, two prominent Taliban members were reportedly arrested during an operation in Qarabagh district.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{1838} In August 2019, a girls’ school was destroyed in a Taliban-claimed explosion in Shadrada district.\textsuperscript{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 district\textsuperscript{1840} and in Paghman district, killing several family members of writer and analyst Assadullah Walwalji.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 soldiers\textsuperscript{1844}, 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1846}

ACLED categorised 10% of all reported violent incidents in Kabul as ‘violence against civilians’.\textsuperscript{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 2019\textsuperscript{1848}; the killing of a Ministry of Finance employee by unidentified gunmen in Paghman district in October 2019\textsuperscript{1849}; the shooting of two prosecutors on their way to Parwan province in Qarabagh district in November 2019\textsuperscript{1850}; the shooting of several members of President Ashraf Ghani’s personal security team while off-duty by


\textsuperscript{1837} Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Key Taliban Figures Arrested in Kabul’s Qarah Bagh, 26 June 2020, \url{http://www.pajhwoknews.com/en/2020/06/26/two-taliban-figures-arrested-in-kabuls-qarah-bagh/}

\textsuperscript{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{https://www.ledac.org/cedc/}

\textsuperscript{1839} 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{https://www.ledac.org/cedc/}


\textsuperscript{1841} Khaama Press, Explosion Leaves 4 Dead, Wounded in Kabul, 4 June 2020, \url{https://www.khaama.com/2020/06/04/explosion-leaves-4-dead-wounded-in-kabul/}


\textsuperscript{1843} 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{https://www.ledac.org/cedc/}


\textsuperscript{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{https://www.ledac.org/cedc/}

\textsuperscript{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{https://www.ledac.org/cedc/}


unknown gunmen in Paghman district in April 2020\textsuperscript{1851}; the killing of the Supreme Court’s administrative chief by unidentified gunmen in Surobi district in May 2020\textsuperscript{1852}; the shooting of two prosecutors and three other employees of the office of the Attorney General in Dehsabz district in June 2020\textsuperscript{1853}; and the killing of the head of the biometrics department of the Ministry of Interior by unknown gunmen in Chaharasyab district in July 2020.\textsuperscript{1854}

In August 2019, UNOCHA reported on Kabul as the province where most attacks on health facilities and medical personnel were recorded.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1857} Without providing further details, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on election related attacks on polling day in Kabul province.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1862} In July 2020, a surge in security threats on the main highways connecting Kabul with neighbouring provinces was reported.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1865} In January 2020, the Taliban attacked the security outpost of Khwaja Zaid on the Kabul-Baghlan Highway, causing several police casualties.\textsuperscript{1866} The same highway was

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{1851} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020 (updated 30 April 2020), \url{url}; RFE/RL, Gunmen Shoot Dead Afghan Presidential Guard on Kabul Outskirts, 4 April 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1852} Pajhwok Afghan News, Supreme Court Official Gunned Down in Kabul, 3 May 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1853} AP, Gunmen Kill 3, Including 2 Prosecutors, in Afghan Capital, 22 June 2020, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020 (updated 25 June 2020), \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1854} Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on 8 July 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1855} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Monthly Humanitarian Update (August 2019), 24 September 2020, \url{url}, p. 2
\item \textsuperscript{1856} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, \url{url}, pp. 97-98
\item \textsuperscript{1857} Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, \url{url}, p. 62
\item \textsuperscript{1858} Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 Killed, 123 Wounded in Election Day Attacks, 28 September 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1859} Rustig, T. and Bjelica, J., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (11): A First Look at How E-Day Went, AAN, 28 September 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1860} 1TV, [Twitter], posted on: 28 September 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1862} Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, \url{url}, p. 63
\item \textsuperscript{1863} Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1864} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{1865} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (20 - 26 January 2020), 29 January 2020, \url{url}, p. 1
\item \textsuperscript{1866} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020 (updated 30 January 2020), \url{url}
\end{footnotes}
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.\textsuperscript{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 years\textsuperscript{1868}—with more incidents recorded in 2019 compared to previous years. AGEs were reported active on this highway\textsuperscript{1869}, controlling some parts of the road\textsuperscript{1870} and using roadblocks to target government employees and members of the Afghan security forces.\textsuperscript{1871} In August 2019, a police outpost securing the Kabul-Kandahar Highway was attacked by the Taliban, killing and wounding several police officers.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1874} Along this highway lies the highly secured Green Village compound in Kabul City, which has been attacked several times in 2019\textsuperscript{1875}, resulting in temporary road closures.\textsuperscript{1876} An international source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019, described the highway between Kabul and Jalalabad as ‘sufficiently safe’, also for international travellers.\textsuperscript{1877} In July 2020, 22 Taliban militants were killed or wounded during an ANDSF operation along this highway\textsuperscript{1878}, which reportedly faced increased security threats.\textsuperscript{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 Jiloz 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.\textsuperscript{1880}

Security threats reportedly increased on the highway connecting Kabul to Logar and Paktia provinces in July 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1882}

\textsuperscript{1867} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020 (updated 27 February 2020), \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1868} Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1870} An international source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhets situasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, \url{url}, p. 29
\textsuperscript{1871} Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 52
\textsuperscript{1872} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23 -29 , 29 August 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1873} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 67
\textsuperscript{1874} Diplomat (The), Next Stop Jalalabad: Traveling One of the World’s Most Dangerous Roads, 13 December 2015, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1875} NYT, After Bombing, Afghans Demand That Foreigners Leave Their Neighbourhood, 4 September 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1876} Al Jazeera, Fatal Blast Rocks Afghan Capital Kabul, 15 January 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1877} Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhets situasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, \url{url}, p. 29
\textsuperscript{1878} Khaama Press, 22 Taliban Militants Killed, Wounded on Kabul-Jalalabad Highway, 7 July 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1879} Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1880} Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1881} Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1882} Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, \url{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, Baghl1885, 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 Baghl (651) (mainly from Dahan-e Ghori district) provinces. Smaller groups of more than 300 IDPs came from the provinces of Logar (all from Baraki Barak district), Kunduz (mainly from Khamabad 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

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
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

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. 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. 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’.

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 City, which is the second largest city in Afghanistan. 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.

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. 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’. Heading southwards, a road connects the city of Kandahar with the Afghan-Pakistani border crossing at Spin Boldak-Chaman. 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. 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 completed, which leads to frequent cross-border clashes and shelling.

According to the airport website, an airport with scheduled passenger services to domestic and international destinations exists in Kandahar City.

In 2016, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project, aiming at transporting gas from Turkmenistan to India, was inaugurated. The pipeline was projected to lead through Afghanistan alongside the Ring Road from Herat to Kandahar and would therefore intersect Taliban-

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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
1906 iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, url; Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url.
1907 Tolonews, Seven Die In Kandahar-Herat Highway Accident, 14 March 2018, url.
1908 iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, url; Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, 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. The project on Afghan side has not started due to security reasons, however authorities prepared special combat unit to secure pipeline construction.

According to the UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Kandahar province decreased by 38% in 2019, compared to 2018.

In March and April 2019, Kandahar was affected by severe flood, which also stopped some AGEs activities.

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.

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. 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. 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.

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. 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. 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 Taliban and soon replaced by his brother, Tadin Khan Atsakzai. 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. 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.

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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
1917 Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (2): The collapse foretold that did not happen, AAN, 14 August 2019, url
1918 Reportedly, 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
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.\textsuperscript{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 Taliban forays, in Khakrez – all in the north – only the district centres are in the government’s hands and remain practically under Taliban siege. In Arghestan, 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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, Arghestan on the north and Registan and Shorbak on the south are still contested.\textsuperscript{1931} In October 2019, US and Afghan forces reportedly conducted air raids on Taliban positions in Maruf, Shah Wali Kot.\textsuperscript{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 Tirin Kot.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{1936}
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 data](image_url)

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

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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](ACLED_data_filter))

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](ACLED_data_filter))

¹⁹³⁹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [p. 68](UNAMA_report)]

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](ACLED_data_filter))

¹⁹⁴¹ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [p. 43](UNAMA_report)]

¹⁹⁴² NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url](NYT_report)

¹⁹⁴³ Associated Press, Bus strikes roadside bomb in southern Afghanistan; 9 killed, 3 June 2020, [url](AP_report)

¹⁹⁴⁴ Salaam Times, Taliban attack Kandahar residents for refusing to abandon homes, 19 June 2019, [url](Salaam_Times_report)

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](ACLED_data_filter))

¹⁹⁴⁶ Associated Press, Taliban attack kills 8 election officials in Afghanistan, 30 June 2019, [url](AP_report)

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](ACLED_data_filter))
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. These forces are reportedly guilty of extrajudicial killings, torture and unlawful and arbitrary detentions. On 10 April 2019, NDS SF killed a school principal and arrested five other persons in Panjwai district. In September 2019, NDS allegedly tortured and killed local imam in Kandahar City what sparked mass protests in the front of governor house. 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.

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. 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.

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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.
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.
2.17 Kapisa

2.17.1 General description of the province

Map 17: Afghanistan – Kapisa province, source: UNOCHA

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. 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.

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Kapisa province has a population of 488,298. The main ethnic groups in Kapisa are Tajik, Pashtun, and Nuristani. 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. Other groups present include Hazara and Pashai, the latter residing in the mountainous areas of Alasay and Kohband districts.

A primary road connects Kapisa’s capital Mahmud-e Raqi to Kabul City.

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
1959 FP, Are Ethnic Politics Afghanistan’s Great Hope?, 11 November 2014, 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. According to UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018, opium-poppy was mainly cultivated in the districts of Tagab and Alasay.

### 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’. Kapisa’s southern district of Tagab is connected to the Uzbin 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]’.

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’.

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.

Remote districts such as Nejrab, Tagab and Alasay have been reported to be the most insecure areas of the province. 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. 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.

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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]
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]
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.)
Media sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in Nejrab, Tagab and Alasay districts. In March 2019, the villages of Afghanistan, Pachaghan and Ghin Dara in Nejrab were reported to be captured by Taliban militants. 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 Taliban in December 2019. Mid-June 2020, Taliban militants reportedly advanced to the district centre of Tagab, after taking 12 checkpoints of local uprising forces. At the end of June 2020, the villages of Firoozkhil, Turkandian, Baiskhel, Sarginan, Khanan and Badakhil in Tagab were reportedly cleared from the Taliban during ANA operations. Several prominent Taliban figures were killed or arrested in the aforementioned three districts. In May 2019, a senior Taliban leader, reportedly involved in planning suicide attacks in Kapisa province, was killed in Nejrab. 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. 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. 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.

Before Gulbuddin Hekmatyar signed a peace agreement with the Afghan government in September 2016, Kapisa was considered one of Hezb-e Islami’s strongholds.

In November 2019 and February 2020, USDOD reported on small groups of ISKP supporters in Kapisa province. One security incident specifically attributed to ISKP has been recorded in Kapisa between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED. 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. 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.

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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
1982 See sources mentioned below.
1983 Khaama Press, Security Forces Kill Talibans Suicide Attacks Planner in Kapisa Province, 23 May 2019, URL
1984 Pajhwok Afghan News, Talibans 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: Afghanistan Times, Afghan Forces Killed Taliban’s Designated Deputy Governor for Panjshir, 4 August 2019, URL
1986 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s Military Commission Head Killed in Kapesa, 29 November 2019, URL
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
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.\textsuperscript{1992}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Kapisa is under the responsibility of the 201\textsuperscript{st} 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{1994} Resolute Support\textsuperscript{1995} 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 data\textsuperscript{1998}

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-

\textsuperscript{1992} Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join Islamic State, USIP, June 2020, url, pp. 4, 11-12
\textsuperscript{1993} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, url, p. 13
\textsuperscript{1994} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94
\textsuperscript{1995} Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{1998} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kapisa, url
government militias).\textsuperscript{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 2019\textsuperscript{2000}, in Nejrab district in October 2019\textsuperscript{2001}, in February 2020\textsuperscript{2002}, in March 2020\textsuperscript{2003} and in June 2020\textsuperscript{2004}, and in Tagab district in March 2020\textsuperscript{2005} and in June 2020\textsuperscript{2006}; as well as attacks/ambushes on the convoy/vehicle of an Afghan local police commander and an intelligence chief in Alasay district in December 2019\textsuperscript{2007} and January 2020\textsuperscript{2008}; and an attack on the head of Kapisa’s police traffic department in Mahmud-e Raqi district in June 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2010} These incidents involved several operations in Nejrab district in April 2019\textsuperscript{2011}, in May 2019\textsuperscript{2012}, in August 2019\textsuperscript{2013} and in November 2019\textsuperscript{2014}, killing several Taliban militants (see above). In Tagab district, various Taliban militants were killed in operations of the Afghan Special Forces in June 2019\textsuperscript{2015} and a Taliban military commander was arrested by the police while placing IEDs in Shinkai village in August 2019.\textsuperscript{2016} In Alasay district, four Taliban militants were wounded during a security forces raid in July 2019.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2018}

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces\textsuperscript{2019}, represented 8\% of all reported security incidents in Kapisa.\textsuperscript{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,

\textsuperscript{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{url}
\textsuperscript{2000} Tolonews, Two Policemen Killed in Taliban Attack in Kapisa, 30 July 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2001} RFE/RL, Taliban Militants Kill Six Afghan Police at Remote Checkpoint Northeast of Kabul, 5 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2002} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020 (updated 27 February 2020), \url{url}; Reuters, U.S.-Taliban Pact to Cut Violence About to Start, Afghan Minister Says Amid Clashes, 18 February 2020, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Kill 9 Pro-Government Fighters in Kapisa, 18 February 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2004} Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Security Forces Killed, 5 Injured in Kapisa Clash, 22 June 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2005} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2006} Tolonews, 4 Public Uprising Forces, 11 Taliban Killed in Kapisa: Official, 15 June 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2007} VoA, Taliban Assault on Army Base Kills 7 Afghan Soldiers, 24 December 2019, \url{url}; Reportedly, Afghan Local Police Commander Killed in Taliban Ambush in Kapisa, 24 December 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2008} Pajhwok Afghan News, Kapisa: District Intelligence Chief Killed in Taliban Ambush, 30 January 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2009} Tolonews, Head of Kapisa Traffic Dept. Killed by Unknown Gunmen, 1 June 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{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{url}
\textsuperscript{2011} Khaama Press, Taliban Sniper Killed in Armed Forces Operation in Kapisa Province, 29 April 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2012} Khaama Press, Security Forces Kill Taliban’s Suicide Attacks Planner in Kapisa Province, 23 May 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2013} Ariana News, Taliban’s Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjshir Killed, 4 August 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjshir Killed: Mol, 4 August 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2014} Pajhwok Afghan News, Kapisa Police Chief Injured in Clash with Taliban, 13 November 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2015} Khaama Press, 16 Taliban Militants Killed, Wounded in Kapisa, Wardak and Herat Provinces, 12 June 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, 9 Militants Killed, Roadside Bombs and House-borne IED Destroyed in Kapisa and Wardak, 29 June 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2016} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s Military Official Arrested in Tagab District, 22 August 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2017} Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Security Forces, 6 Rebels Killed in Fresh Offensives, 4 July 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2018} Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 NDS Agents Killed by Illegal Gunman in Kapisa, 21 June 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2019} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 17-23, 23 May 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{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{url}
killing four civilians.\textsuperscript{2021} In the same district in October 2019, six members of a family were killed in a roadside bomb explosion.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2022} While air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs in the aforementioned districts\textsuperscript{2022}, 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.\textsuperscript{2026}

Mortars and grenades fired by Taliban militants in Nejrab district in July 2019\textsuperscript{2027} and in Tagab district in March 2020\textsuperscript{2028} and April 2020\textsuperscript{2029}, 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’.\textsuperscript{2030} These incidents involved for example: civilian houses being targeted by the Taliban with a grenade launcher in Nejrab district in July 2019\textsuperscript{2031}; civilians being killed in operations by Afghan and US security forces in Nejrab district in December 2019\textsuperscript{2032}; a civilian vehicle being attacked by Taliban militants in Tagab district in March 2020\textsuperscript{2033}; and the killing of an appellate court judge by unidentified gunmen in Afghanha village in the area of PD 1 in June 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2036} Without providing further details, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on election related attacks on polling day in Kapisa province\textsuperscript{2037}, including the beating of an agent of the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA).\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{2021} Ariana News, Roadside Bomb Kills 4 Civilians in Kapisa, 21 May 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2022} Pajhwok Afghan News, Women Among 6 of a family Killed in Kapisa Blast, 2 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2023} Pajhwok Afghan News, ANA Soldier Killed, 12 Wounded in Kapisa Explosion, 6 November 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{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{url}
\textsuperscript{2025} Khaama Press, Up to 50 Militants Killed in Afghan Special Forces Operations, Airstrikes, 6 March 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Afghan Air Force’s A-29s and MD-530s Target Taliban Hideouts in Kunar and Kapisa, 23 March 2020, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s Military Commission Head Killed in Kapesa, 29 November 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2026} Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Civilians Killed in Kapisa Operations, Says Rights Watchdog, 29 December 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2027} Khaama Press, Taliban Target Civilian Houses with Grenade Launcher in Kapisa: 201st Silab Corps, 18 July 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2028} Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians, Policeman Killed in Kapesa Mortar Shell Attack, 25 March 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2029} Khaama Press, Taliban Militants Kill 1 Civilian, Wound 3 Others in Kapisa Province, 20 April 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{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{url}
\textsuperscript{2031} Khaama Press, Up to 50 Militants Killed in Afghan Special Forces Operations, Airstrikes, 6 March 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Afghan Air Force’s A-29s and MD-530s Target Taliban Hideouts in Kunar and Kapisa, 23 March 2020, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s Military Commission Head Killed in Kapesa, 29 November 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2032} Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Civilians Killed in Kapisa Operations, Says Rights Watchdog, 29 December 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2033} Khaama Press, Taliban Target Civilian Houses with Grenade Launcher in Kapisa: 201st Silab Corps, 18 July 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2034} Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians, Policeman Killed in Kapesa Mortar Shell Attack, 25 March 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2035} Khaama Press, Taliban Militants Kill 1 Civilian, Wound 3 Others in Kapisa Province, 20 April 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2036} 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{url}
\textsuperscript{2037} Khaama Press, Taliban Target Civilian Houses with Grenade Launcher in Kapisa: 201st Silab Corps, 18 July 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2038} Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Civilians Killed in Kapisa Operations, Says Rights Watchdog, 29 December 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2039} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2040} Tolonews, Gunmen Shoot and Kill Judge in Kapisa, 23 June 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2041} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, \url{url}, p. 98
\textsuperscript{2042} Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, \url{url}, p. 62
\textsuperscript{2043} Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 Killed, 123 Wounded in Election Day Attacks, 28 September 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2044} Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Observers Killed, Many Beaten on Polling Day, 17 October 2019, \url{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.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url}

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.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url}

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 Kohestan.\footnote{UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 2 April 2019, url, p. 1} 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.\footnote{UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 29 January 2020, url, p. 1}

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.\footnote{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} 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.\footnote{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

A part of Loya Paktya (i.e. ‘Greater Paktya’), an area also encompassing the provinces of Paktya and Paktika, 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. 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.

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. As stated by AAN founder Thomas Ruttig, Khost is part of one of the three major Pashtun regions of Afghanistan. The province is primarily inhabited by Pashtuns, with approximately 1% Tajik. US-bad Tribal Analysis Center (TAC) also mentioned the presence of other minorities (Sikh, Hazara) in Khost City. 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

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2045 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Khost Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
2047 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: South Eastern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
2049 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url], p. 4
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.\textsuperscript{2053} In 2013, TAC described the Zadran as historically strong but also ‘loose’, characterized by infighting and multiple political affiliations.\textsuperscript{2054} Furthermore, Kuchi and Musalyan nomads are said to live in Khost seasonally.\textsuperscript{2055} According to Afghanistan expert Antonio Giustozzi, there were over 50,000 nomad families in Khost as of May 2019.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2057}

In 2013, TAC described Khost as a ‘[...] major transit hub for trade from Pakistan [...]’.\textsuperscript{2058} Khost reportedly has three border crossings with Pakistan (Ghulam Khan, Babrak Tanai and Zazai Maidan).\textsuperscript{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 \textit{tazkera}, under the condition that they have relatives living on the other side of the Durand Line.\textsuperscript{2060} There is also an unofficial motorable crossing point to Pakistan in Jajimaydan district, which has been temporarily closed in the past as well.\textsuperscript{2061}

The so-called Khost-Gardez Pass connects Khost with neighbouring Paktya, Logar and ultimately Kabul.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2065}

According to the airport map produced by the Austrian COI department, an airport with scheduled passenger services does not exist in Khost.\textsuperscript{2066}

The 2018 UNODC Opium Survey reported that Khost has been poppy-free at least since 2013.\textsuperscript{2067}

\textsuperscript{2053} TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, \url{url}, p. 8
\textsuperscript{2054} TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, \url{url}, p. 8
\textsuperscript{2055} TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, \url{url}, p. 9
\textsuperscript{2056} Giustozzi, A., Nomad-settler conflict in Afghanistan today, AREU, 13 November 2019, \url{url}, p. 14
\textsuperscript{2057} RFE/RL/Gandhara, In Afghanistan, Lockdown Hits Waziristan Refugees Hard, 21 April 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2058} TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, \url{url}, p. 9
\textsuperscript{2059} Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost market unaffected by closure of Pakistan border, 8 July 2016, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2060} Pajhwok Afghan News, Af-Pak trade via Ghulam Khan route set to resume, 5 March 2018, \url{url}, Sabawoon, A. M., The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2061} Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost market unaffected by closure of Pakistan border, 8 July 2016, \url{url}, Sabawoon, A. M., The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2062} iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, \url{url}; NYT, Costly Afghanistan Road Project Is Marred by Unsavory Alliances, 1 May 2011, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2063} ThinkProgress, Afghans fearful as CIA-backed militias patrol the ground and U.S. drones haunt the skies, 13 December 2017, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2064} Tolonews, Afghan Forces Hold ‘Full Control’ Of Key Highway In Southeast, 31 March 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2065} Tolonews, Durand Line Fencing Splits Afghan Families, 31 March 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2066} Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019, available upon request under \url{https://www.staatendokumentation.at/de/} (accessed by EASO on 25 March 2019)
\textsuperscript{2067} UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, \url{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. 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.’

As of May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mawlawi Abdullah Hussainai, 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. 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.

The Haqqani Network has reportedly been most active in the ‘Zadran Arc’, with its late founder Jalaluddin Haqqani being a member of the Zadran tribe. The group is affiliated with the Taliban, though it declared itself independent from the Quetta Shura from 2007 to 2015. 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’, a perception seemingly shared by Ruttig. The Haqqani Network reportedly maintains close ties to the Pakistani secret service ISI, as well as other Pakistani militant groups and Al Qaeda.

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). 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. Over 2019 and 2020, the

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2069 Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’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
2073 AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, URL
2074 AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, URL
2075 AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, URL
2076 AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, URL
2077 AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, URL
2078 AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, URL
2079 AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, URL

2080 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
Afghan security forces led several operations against the Haqqani Network in Khost and notably killed twelve of its commanders in Sabari district. In a May 2020 report, the UN Security Council listed Khost among the 12 provinces where Al Qaeda was supposed to be ‘covertly active’. UNAMA added that its main tasks consist in ‘training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring’. In terms of presence of government security forces, Khost province is under the responsibility of the ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces. 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’. 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. Headquartered at Camp Chapman, outside Khost City, the KFP manpower ranges between 3,000 and 10,000, plus a network of informants. 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’. 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. However, in April 2020, French daily newspaper Libération stated that Sabari district was under Taliban control. In a regional overview, ACLED reported that in July 2019, the Taliban had taken over areas of Jajimaydan district. 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.

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2080 Tolonews, 12 Haqqani Network Commanders Killed In Khost, 11 June 2019, [url]
USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url], p. 14
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
Washington Post (The), CIA runs shadow war with Afghan militia implicated in civilian killings, 3 December 2015, [url]
FP, How the CIA Aims to Keep a Footprint in Afghanistan, 8 August 2019, [url]
UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], pp. 53, 57
HRW, “They’ve Shot Many Like This” Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url]
UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], pp. 9, 58, 64-65
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.
Libération, Naître et donner la vie en pays pachtoun [To be born and to give life in Pashtun country], 11 April 2020, [url]
ACLED, Regional Overview-Asia, 31 July 2019, [url]
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2097} In Khost City, the security situation was also said to be better than the usual at this time of year.\textsuperscript{2098} However, in May 2020, RFE/RL’s Gandhara observed that ‘the security situation [had] been deteriorating’ in the previous weeks.\textsuperscript{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%).\textsuperscript{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 data](image)

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

\textsuperscript{2094} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 94
\textsuperscript{2095} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69 ; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 72 At the time of writing, UNAMA provincial data for 2020 was not available.
\textsuperscript{2096} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, \url{url}, p. 69
\textsuperscript{2097} AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{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{url}
\textsuperscript{2099} RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Mosque Attacks Kill 13 Worshippers Breaking Fast, 20 May 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{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{url} For more information on ACLED’s methodology, see: Introduction – Sources. 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{url}
35. Based on ACLED data, the least affected districts were Gurbuz (3 events), Jajimaydan (4), Tani (4) and Shamal (7).  

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.

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. 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. 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. UNAMA expressed concern over Pakistan-initiated cross-border incidents in Kunar, Zabul and Khost provinces, which caused 39 child casualties (8 killed, 31 injured).

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, the most represented subcategory 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). 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. In other districts, several civilians were killed by explosives in Tani and Sabari, in November 2019. 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. 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...

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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, Paktiya: 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; 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

2108 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25- Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, url

2109 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, url

2110 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

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.\textsuperscript{2112} In April 2020, an unclaimed bomb exploded along the convoy of provincial governor Hamil Fidai, who survived.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2116} In Sabari, two unclaimed shootings against worshippers praying in mosques resulted in four deaths overall in May 2020.\textsuperscript{2117} Other incidents included the shooting of a local TV journalist, in March 2019, for which ‘an Islamic State affiliate’ claimed responsibility.\textsuperscript{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, Paktia 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2121} Overall, the main district of origin of IDPs was Sabari (1 750), accounting for 62.6% 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.\textsuperscript{2122} According to several UNOCHA reports, ongoing conflict appeared to be the main cause of displacement.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{2112} RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Ends Partial Truce As Deadly Bombing Hits Near Soccer Ground, 2 March 2020, \url{url}; Tolonews, Blast in Khost Kills Three Civilians: Mol, 2 March 2020, \url{url}; NYT, U.S. Announces Troop Withdrawal in Afghanistan as Respite From Violence Ends, 2 March 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2113} RFE/RL/Gandhara, Attacks Across Afghanistan Kill Dozens Of Security Force Members [Source : AFP], Civilians, 22 April 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{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{url}

\textsuperscript{2115} NYT, U.S. Drone Killed Afghan Civilians, Officials Say, 1 December 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, US forces, AIHRC probing Khost drone strike, 1 December 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{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{url}

\textsuperscript{2117} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, \url{url}; RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Mosque Attacks Kill 13 Worshippers Breaking Fast, 20 May 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2118} AP, Taliban kill 22 Afghan forces in attack on checkpoints, 17 March 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2119} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, pp. 9, 57-58, 64-65

\textsuperscript{2120} RFE/RL/Gandhara, Tribe Burns Down Houses Of Alleged Murderers In Southeast Afghanistan, 16 June 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2121} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2122} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{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.

2.19 Kunar

2.19.1 General description of the province

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. 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. 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. The provincial capital is Asadabad.

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2125 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.\textsuperscript{2130} It is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Pashai and Nuristani.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2132}

The national highway ‘NH01’ starts from Jalalabad, passes through the districts of Nurgal, Chawkay, Narang, Asadabad, Shigal and leads to Asmar.\textsuperscript{2133} From Asmar, the highway leads to Nuristan province through Ghaziredab and Nari districts. Blocked in 2017 by insurgents, it was reopened by ANDSF in August 2018 after a series of operations.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2136} However, in September 2019, UNOCHA reported that militant groups were blocking unspecified highways in Kunar.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2138} In June 2020, Pakistani forces have been accused of encroaching on Afghan territory while building a fence along the border in Kunar.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2141} As of May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mawalawi Hamdullah Urugzani, 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.\textsuperscript{2142} By December 2019, according to the provincial vice-governor, about 1 000 militants, most of them former members of the Taliban, had

\textsuperscript{2130} Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, \url{u}, p. 4
\textsuperscript{2131} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., \url{u}, Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunar, n. d., \url{u}
\textsuperscript{2132} IWPR, Illegal Logging Destroying Afghan Forests, 23 January 2018, \url{u}; RFE/RL/Gandhara, Precious Stones Illegally Mined In Afghan Province, 24 April 2020, \url{u}; FP, Afghanistan’s Forests are Turning a Profit for the Islamic State, 15 July 2019, \url{u}
\textsuperscript{2133} Italy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Evaluation Report - Afghanistan: Rehabilitation of Maidan Shar – Bamyan Road, 2014, \url{u}, p. 8; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, \url{u}
\textsuperscript{2134} Salaam Times, Afghan forces reopen key Kunar highway blocked by Taliban, 9 August 2018, \url{u}
\textsuperscript{2135} Libération, Afghanistan : mon voisin, ce taliban devenu fréquentable [Afghanistan : my neighbour, this Taliban guy who has become reputable], 3 February 2020, \url{u}
\textsuperscript{2136} Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunar’s Nawapas road reopens after 5-year closure, 7 September 2019, \url{u}; Sabawoon, A. M., The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, \url{u}
\textsuperscript{2137} UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 – 29 September 2019), 2 October 2019, \url{u}
\textsuperscript{2138} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., \url{u}
\textsuperscript{2139} Tolonews, ‘Pakistani Forces Building Facilities on Afghan Soil’: Residents, 8 June 2020, \url{u}
\textsuperscript{2140} UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, \url{u}, p. 23
\textsuperscript{2141} Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (version 2.0.), 7 April 2020, \url{u}, p. 41
\textsuperscript{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{u}, pp. 8-9, 27
reportedly enrolled in a NDS-sponsored ‘Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration’ program in Kunar.\footnote{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 with the Haqqani Network, headed by Shir Khan Manga in the operational zone composed of Kunar and Nuristan.\footnote{2144} UNAMA added that Al Qaeda’s main tasks consist in ‘training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring’.\footnote{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.\footnote{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.\footnote{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.\footnote{2148} During the first half of 2019, ISKP appeared to gain territory in the province,\footnote{2149} which had already been described as one of its strongholds in Afghanistan in February 2019.\footnote{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.\footnote{2151} Although the group endured further losses in Kunar in early 2020,\footnote{2152} the UN Secretary General stated that the province had ‘effectively become the group’s new Afghan core areas’.\footnote{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 Chawkay district, where the dense forests provide quality hideouts,\footnote{2154} in Narang, Nurgal and Chapadara,\footnote{2155} as well as in Watapur and Dara-e Pech districts.\footnote{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 2019,\footnote{2157} 1 200, according to the provincial governor in January 2020,\footnote{2158} and 2 100, as stated by the UN Secretary General in February 2020.\footnote{2159}
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-Qaeda 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. According to AAN’s Kate Clark, in 2017, the NDS-04 unit numbered 250 men. However, another AAN report stated that Kunar was actually the operation field of the NDS-02 Special forces unit.

In April 2020, RFE/RL’s Gandhara reported that the Taliban and other AGEs controlled ‘large swathes of rural territories’ in Kunar province. 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). 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. 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. In September 2019, on the eve of the presidential election, the Taliban retook parts of Manroo (equated with Marawara by AAN) district that they had lost to ISKP six months earlier.

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. 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.

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. 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.

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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 Rutting, 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 Rutting, T., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (19): An ambiguous picture of E-day civilian casualties, AAN, 17 October 2019, url
2180 VeA, In One Afghan Province, the Taliban Safe-Guarded the Elections, 8 October 2019, url
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 %).\footnote{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{url} For more information on ACLED’s methodology, see: Introduction – Sources.}

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).\footnote{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{url}}

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.\footnote{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{url}}

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.\footnote{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{url}} 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.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Kunar Conflict – Update (as of 3 April 2019), 4 April 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Heavy clashes underway between Taliban, ISIS militants in two districts of Kunar, 22 June 2019, \url{url}} 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.\footnote{VoA, US Admits Taliban Offensive Is Whittling IS’s Grip on Afghanistan, 20 March 2020, \url{url}}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure21.png}
\caption{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 data.}
\end{figure}
The 38 ANDSF-initiated clashes were spread out across 12 districts, with a peak of 5 in Nurgal, where 11 Taliban were killed in May 2019. In early 2020, several raids were conducted against ISKP in Chawkay and Nurgal districts. 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.

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). Most of them targeted AGEs in Chawkay district, where, for instance, five ISKP fighters were killed in November 2019.

ACLED also listed 21 ‘Shelling/artillery/missile attacks’, which included several cross-border incidents initiated by the Pakistani military forces. 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. 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. In October 2019, another Pakistani shelling killed three women in Nari district. 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.

Most of the seven violent events against civilians documented by ACLED were disruptions caused by the Taliban to the presidential election across the province, notably in Dangam and Barkunar districts, where they attacked polling centres. Overall, seven civilians were wounded in these attacks. However, in Manroo district (equated with Marawara by AAN), where ISKP had threatened civilians who would take part to the voting process, the Taliban actually ensured the safety of the voters.

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
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 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
2198 Khaama Press, Airstrikes kill 13 ISIS militants in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces of Afghanistan, 9 November 2019, url
2199 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
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
2205 Ruttlig, 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.\textsuperscript{207}

Although, in April 2019, Kunar was listed among the provinces where the Taliban most disrupted the polio vaccination campaigns\textsuperscript{208}, in August 2019, a four-years long ban on immunization services was lifted in Nurgal district\textsuperscript{220}, while UNOCHA mentioned the reopening of several health centres that had been kept closed for an undefined period in Ghaziabad and Digal districts.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 680,000,000 to Kabul province.\textsuperscript{2213} Chapadara district alone accounted for 28,898 of Kunar’s IDPs. Of them, over 25,000 were displaced in March 2019\textsuperscript{2214}, due to clashes between ISKP and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{2217} These displacement waves are linked to inter-AGEs clashes in Nurgal’s case\textsuperscript{2218}, and to ANDSF operations against ISKP in Chawkay and Nurgal.\textsuperscript{2219} Cross-border shelling was another cause of displacement, such as in Nari district in October 2019.\textsuperscript{2220} In October 2019, clashes between Afghan and Pakistani forces resulted in 3,500 – 4,200 people being displaced in the Kunar border areas.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{2222}

\textsuperscript{207} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 23
\textsuperscript{208} VoA, Official: Taliban, IS Deprive Afghan Kids of Polio Vaccine, 18 April 2019, url
\textsuperscript{209} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (18 – 25 August 2019), 25 August 2019, url
\textsuperscript{210} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (29 July – 04 August 2019), 7 August 2019, url
\textsuperscript{211} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Special Report: Attacks on Healthcare during the COVID-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, url, p. 9
\textsuperscript{212} 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
\textsuperscript{213} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url: UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{214} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url: UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{215} BBC News, ضر در نورگال: درگیری دو طالبان در شرق افغانستان [Clashes between ISIS and the Taliban in eastern Afghanistan have displaced 2,000 families], 27 March 2019, url
\textsuperscript{216} UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Kunar Conflict – Update (as of 3 April 2019), 4 April 2019, url
\textsuperscript{217} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url: UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{218} UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 September – 22 September 2019), 22 September 2019, url
\textsuperscript{219} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (2 March - 8 March 2020), 11 March 2020, url
\textsuperscript{220} AP, Afghan, Pakistani forces clash on border, 3 civilians killed, 28 October 2019, url
\textsuperscript{221} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October – 3 November 2019), 6 November 2019, url
\textsuperscript{222} 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

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. Kunduz province is divided into the following administrative units: Aliabad, Char Darah, Dasht-e-Archi, Emam saheb, Khanabad, Kunduz and Qala-e-Zal. Gulbad, Gultepa and Aqtash are more recently established districts. The provincial capital is Kunduz City.

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. The main ethnic group in the province are Pashtuns. Other ethnic groups present include Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazara, Turkmen and Pashai as well as Qazak, Aymaq, Arab, Gujar, Baluch and Nuristani.

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). The Kunduz-Takhar Highway passes through the district of

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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
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. 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. After having been controlled by the Taliban for about a month, Kunduz-Khanabad road was re-opened by Afghan security forces at the end of December 2019.

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.

The inauguration of a new terminal with a capacity of 1 300 passengers at Kunduz airport was announced in February 2017. While officials announced in March 2018 that civil flights would resume soon at Kunduz airport, there was no information available on scheduled flights as of July 2020.

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’.

### 2.20.2 Conflict background and actors in Kunduz

The security situation of Kunduz province has purportedly been deteriorating over recent years, including in 2019. Kunduz was the last Taliban stronghold before the Taliban's fall in 2001, when it was freed by US led security forces. Kunduz City temporary fell to the Taliban in September 2015 and they almost recaptured it in October 2016 by encircling the city and cutting off the main supply and reinforcement routes. 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, Emam saheb 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.

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. 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. However according to an Afghanistan analyst contacted by the Swedish Migration

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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, 7 March 2018, 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2252} According to Obaid Ali the Taliban controlled more or less most districts in Kunduz province.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2254} At the end of 2019 Emamsaheb district was described as ‘largely controlled by the Taliban’.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2257} A June 2019 New York Times article noted that ISKP cells had recently appeared in Kunduz province.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2260} An attack on a checkpoint on the border between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in November 2019 was attributed to ISKP by Tajik officials,\textsuperscript{2261} 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2263} Besides Uzbek and Tajik militants, fighters coming from

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{2248} Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 48

\textsuperscript{2249} Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2250} Bjelica J., One Land, Two Rules (5): The polio vaccination gap, AAN, 9 May 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2251} Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2252} Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Säkerhetsläget i Kunduz, 22 January 2019, \url{url}, p. 28

\textsuperscript{2253} Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2254} JUH/JACK, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Kunduz Province, November 2019, \url{url}, pp. 14-15; 20

\textsuperscript{2255} NYT, Roadside Bomb Kills 13 People on Their Way to Afghan Wedding, 28 November 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2256} LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url{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.

\textsuperscript{2257} Jamestown Foundation (The), Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, 6 April 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2258} NYT, U.S. Special Forces Battle Against ISIS Turns to Containment, and Concern, 14 June 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2259} Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces arrest top ISIS leader in Kunduz province, 7 July 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2260} Dr. Drexluddin Khan Spivezyai (@RisboLensky), [Twitter], posted on: 19 October 2019, \url{url}; Dr. Drexluddin Khan Spivezyai (@RisboLensky), [Twitter], posted on: 6 August 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2261} Asia Plus, Tajik security forces launch operation to hunt alleged terrorists who turn out to be … ordinary hunters, 11 November 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2262} NYT, ISIS Fighters Attack Outpost in Tajikistan, 6 November 2019, \url{url}; RFE/RL, Reported Attack In Tajikistan Could Have Broad Implications For Central Asia, 6 November 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2263} DW, Kunduz violence could destabilize neighbors, 30 September 2015, \url{url}
\end{flushleft}
Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Chechnya were also reported to have been active in the province. 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.

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. 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.

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. 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. 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.

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. 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.

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2266 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2019, url, p. 78
2269 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94
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 data.

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. 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) or government officials. These also included attacks on military or police facilities such as checkpoints, bases and headquarters and on convoys and vehicles. These attacks inflicted losses among security forces causing concern in December 2019 about a rise in casualties. 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. Civilian casualties were also reported during clashes in Chardarah district in March 2019 or in Dasht-e- Archi district in September 2019. Civilians were killed in crossfire

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2274 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kunduz.
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).
2286 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019.
2287 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-july 4, 4 July 2019.
2290 Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 Afghan soldiers killed in Kunduz assault.
2291 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019.
2293 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019.
2294 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-july 4, 4 July 2019.
2295 Pajhwok Afghan News, 16 ANA soldiers killed in Taliban attack in Kunduz, 4 March 2019.
2299 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019.
2302 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019.

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.\footnote{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} Afghan forces also stepped up operations against the Taliban in Kunduz towards the end of 2019.\footnote{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} Several of the security operations in Kunduz province were backed by air strikes.\footnote{2290 While operations led to arrests\footnote{2291} and inflicted losses among AGEs,\footnote{2292} 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 City\footnote{2293}, in Gultepa district.\footnote{2294}} While operations led to arrests and inflicted losses among AGEs, 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 City, in Gultepa district.

The Taliban temporarily overtook district administrative centres in Dasht-e-Archi\footnote{2295 Qala-e-Zal and Khanabad districts in the last quarter of 2019.\footnote{2296} In March 2019, areas in Emamsaheb district were temporarily captured by the Taliban.\footnote{2297}} and Khanabad districts in March 2019, areas in Emamsaheb district were temporarily captured by the Taliban.

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.\footnote{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.\footnote{2300 While those air strikes destroyed Taliban facilities, such as hideouts, weapon caches and prisons, and inflicted 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.\footnote{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.\footnote{2300} While those air strikes destroyed Taliban facilities, such as hideouts, weapon caches and prisons, and inflicted

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{2287 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, url: NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, url}
\item \footnote{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}
\item \footnote{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}
\item \footnote{2290 While operations led to arrests and inflicted losses among AGEs, 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 City, in Gultepa district.}
\item \footnote{2295 Qala-e-Zal and Khanabad districts in the last quarter of 2019. In March 2019, areas in Emamsaheb district were temporarily captured by the Taliban.}
\item \footnote{2296 While those air strikes destroyed Taliban facilities, such as hideouts, weapon caches and prisons, and inflicted 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. 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. While those air strikes destroyed Taliban facilities, such as hideouts, weapon caches and prisons, and inflicted}
\item \footnote{2297}
\item \footnote{2298}
\item \footnote{2299}
\item \footnote{2300}
\end{itemize}
losses among AGEs\textsuperscript{2301}, 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 funeral\textsuperscript{2302} or in Emamsahel district on 21 March 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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)\textsuperscript{2305} in May 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2307}

Incidents where the Taliban or unidentified armed groups used roadside bombs and IEDs to target Afghan and international security forces or government officials\textsuperscript{2308}, represented 7% of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Kunduz province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2310} Also in Khanabad district, at least six labourers were killed after their car was hit by a roadside bomb on 1 June 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 2019\textsuperscript{2314}, 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 family\textsuperscript{2315}, 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.\textsuperscript{2316}

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\textsuperscript{2301} Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces destroy Taliban prison, arms and explosives depots in Kunduz, 9 April 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban killed, 6 wounded in Kunduz airstrikes, 9 January 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January – 2 February 2020), 5 February 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2302} NYT, Taliban’s Continued Attacks Show Limits of U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan, 31 January 2020, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilian deaths in Kunduz strike trigger protest, 31 January 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{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{url}
\textsuperscript{2304} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2305} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2306} UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, \url{p. 16}
\textsuperscript{2307} UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, \url{p. 16}
\textsuperscript{2308} NYT, American Special Forces Soldier Is Killed in Afghanistan, 22 December 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{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{url}
\textsuperscript{2310} NYT, Roadside Bomb Kills 13 People On Their Way to Afghan Wedding, 28 November 2019, \url{url}; Tolonews, 13 Dead in Kunduz Blast All Belonged to Two Families, 28 November 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz: 15 civilians killed in roadside blast, 28 November 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2311} Afghan Times, Roadside bomb kills 7 workers in Kunduz, 2 June 2020, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 labourers killed, 6 wounded in Kunduz blast, 2 June 2020, \url{url}; NYT,Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (1 – 7 June 2020), 10 June 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2312} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, \url{url}; Pajhwok afghan News, 5 children injured in Kunduz roadside blast, 14 February 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{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{url}
\textsuperscript{2314} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2315} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{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. These included attacks by Afghan or international military forces or by pro-government forces, during which civilians were killed; the killing of civilians in a wedding convoy for refusing to pay money to soldiers; the ISKP-claimed killing of a Shiite cleric, another killing of a Shiite religious scholar attributed to the Taliban; the Taliban firing at wedding party guests in Kunduz City; the killing of a bodybuilder; the killing of government employees and officials; the killing of off-duty ANDSF personnel; the killing of the brother of a special forces commander; the killing of a tribal elder accused of having relations with the intelligence service; and the killing of a human rights activist by the Taliban or unidentified anti-government armed groups.

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. 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 2019 and on 19 May 2020.

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.

Following reports of the Taliban gathering on the outskirts of the city in March 2019, Kunduz was the focus of Taliban attacks just after the announcement of the spring fighting season. Again following reports of high levels of Taliban activity near the provincial capital, on 31 August 2019, Kunduz was the first of three provincial centres, the others being Pul-e Khumri and Farah, to come...

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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).


2320 Dr. Drexluddin Khan Spiveyza (@RisboLensky), [Twitter], posted on: 4 August 2019, Melisa (@cmellaniac), [Twitter], posted on: 4 August 2019.

2321 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019.


2326 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019.

2327 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019.


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).

2330 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).

2331 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12.


under Taliban attack from different directions.\textsuperscript{2336} This was the third time Kunduz came under Taliban attack since 2015\textsuperscript{2337} and it happened at a time when talks between the Taliban and the United States were finalizing.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2339} They were able to enter deep into the city and briefly occupy the health department and a hospital.\textsuperscript{2340} According to initial reports, civilians stayed in their homes on 31 August 2019.\textsuperscript{2341} Exit routes were contested, phone lines were disrupted and electricity interrupted\textsuperscript{2342}, affecting water supply.\textsuperscript{2343} Markets, bazaars and shops were closed.\textsuperscript{2344} In the evening a suicide bombing was carried out on Kunduz’s main square, wounding the provincial police chief.\textsuperscript{2345} By the next day the fighting had ended and phone and power lines were partly restored, according to UNOCHA.\textsuperscript{2346} Initial reports mentioned at least 61 civilian casualties.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2348} However the main routes to and from the city remained closed in the beginning of September 2019.\textsuperscript{2349} This also affected food prices.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2351} Civilian homes were damaged by the fighting.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2353} The suicide attack took place in the outskirts of the city, near the highway connecting Kunduz with other provinces.\textsuperscript{2354} On 19 May 2020 the Taliban again attacked different parts and several checkpoints of

\textsuperscript{2336} Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taliban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan City Survives Third Taliban Assault, but Loses a Top Defender, 31 August 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, \url{url}.

\textsuperscript{2337} Tolonews, Afghan Forces Responding Taliban Attack In Kunduz, 31 August 2019, \url{url}.

\textsuperscript{2338} Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taliban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, \url{url}.

\textsuperscript{2339} Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taliban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, \url{url}.

\textsuperscript{2340} NYT, Taliban Second Afghan City in 2 Days as Peace Deal Nears, 1 September 2019, \url{url}.

\textsuperscript{2341} UNOCHA, Flash Update 1 – Armed clashes in Kunduz city (31 Aug 2019), 31 August 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan City Survives Third Taliban Assault, but Loses a Top Defender, 31 August 2019, \url{url}.

\textsuperscript{2342} UNOCHA, Flash Update 1 – Armed clashes in Kunduz city (31 Aug 2019), 31 August 2019, \url{url}.


\textsuperscript{2344} Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz City comes under multi-pronged rebel attack, 31 August 2019, \url{url}; BBC, Afghanistan conflict: Taliban storm key northern city, 31 August 2019, \url{url}.

\textsuperscript{2345} Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz police chief wounded in blast amid clashes, 31 August 2019, \url{url}.

\textsuperscript{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{url}.

\textsuperscript{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{url}.

\textsuperscript{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{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{url}; Tolonews, 20 Security Force Members Killed in Kunduz Battle, 1 September 2019, \url{url}.

\textsuperscript{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{url}.

\textsuperscript{2350} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) Meeting 04 Sep 2019 at 09:00 AM in ACTED Kunduz Office 4 September 2019, \url{url}; p. 1; Salaam Times, Kunduz residents describe miserable living conditions after Taliban offensive, 9 September 2019, \url{url}.

\textsuperscript{2351} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}; p. 35

\textsuperscript{2352} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pul-e-Khumri Flash Update No.4, 9 September 2019, \url{url}.

\textsuperscript{2353} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Update: Suicide attack in Kunduz leaves at least 17 dead, wounded, 2 September 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 policemen killed, 7 injured in Kunduz suicide blast, 2 September 2019, \url{url}.

\textsuperscript{2354} Tolonews, Suicide Bombing Targets Afghan Forces In Kunduz, 2 September 2019, \url{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

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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
2359 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url
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
2364 Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, url
2367 Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taliban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, 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 districts,\(^{2374}\), 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 Emamsahab district in July and September 2019. All IDPs from Emamsahab 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 Emamsahab district hosted only IDPs from within the district.\(^{2381}\)

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\(^{2371}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Girls’ school set ablaze in Kunduz’s Qa’la Zal district, 6 October 2019, url

\(^{2372}\) WHO, Afghanistan. Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019

\(^{2373}\) 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


\(^{2377}\) 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

2.21 Laghman

2.21.1 General description of the province

Map 21: Afghanistan – Laghman province, source: UNOCHA

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: Ailingar, Alishang, Dawlatshah, Mehtarlam, Qarghayi\(^{2384}\), 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 2020/21\(^{2386}\) 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 district\(^{2389}\), 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, Ailingar 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 Afghanistan\(^{2396}\) operating in the mountainous Ailingar 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

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\(^{2383}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](https://www.unocha.org)

\(^{2384}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](https://www.unocha.org)

\(^{2385}\) Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Laghman, 2020, [url](https://www.iec.org.af)

\(^{2386}\) Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, n.d., [url](https://www.iec.org.af)

\(^{2387}\) 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](https://bmj.bmj.com)

\(^{2388}\) BMF, Background profile of Laghman province, n.d., [url](https://afghanistan.mofar.gov.af)

\(^{2389}\) Stars and Stripes, Insurgents in Afghanistan’s Laghman province may win by not losing, 15 November 2014, [url](https://www.armytimes.com)

\(^{2390}\) NSIA, Country profile for Afghanistan, alerts, 7 February 2020, [url](https://www.nsia.org/)

\(^{2391}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](https://www.unocha.org)

\(^{2392}\) Foschini, F., The Enteqal Seven (2): Around Mehtarlam, an ‘insurgency corridor’ in the making, AAN, 10 May 2011, [url](https://www.aan.com)

\(^{2393}\) INSi, Country profile for Afghanistan, alerts, 7 February 2020, [url](https://www.insi.org/)

\(^{2394}\) UNOC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](https://www.unodc.org)

\(^{2395}\) AAN, New world drug report: opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, 25 June 2020, [url](https://www.aan.com)

\(^{2396}\) Khaama Press, Four key Taliban group leaders ambushed in Laghman province, 1 October 2018, [url](https://www.khaama.com)

\(^{2397}\) Salam Times, Security forces launch operation in Laghman amid Taliban-ISIS clashes, 27 February 2018, [url](https://www.salamtimes.com)

\(^{2398}\) 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, p. 7

\(^{2399}\) Salam Times, Stepped up operations forces ISIS fighters to lay down arms in Laghman, 23 March 2020, [url](https://www.salamtimes.com)

\(^{2390}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 Taliban including shadow governor killed in Laghman airstrike, 27 December 2019, [url](https://www.pajhwok.com)

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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 Ailingar 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 Rabii, 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 Agegne France Press (AFP), showing in a photo the presence of Taliban fighters in Ailingar district. 2401 In May 2020, Etilaatroz indicated that Taliban fighters had a widespread presence and carried out their activities in Mehtarlam district 2402 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 Pashayeeel2404, and the head of the Taliban military commission for the mentioned province was Mawlawi Qais. Talibans based in Ailingar 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, Ailingar 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

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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, Talibain, 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، خیام افغان در ترکستان،۱۲ شده شدی،۲۵۹[informal translation: ‘three civilians killed in an explosion in Laghman, 2 May 2020], url
2403 Etilaatroz، افغان در ثوران،۲۱ شده شدی،۲۵۹[informal translation: ‘killing of 21 army soldiers in Laghman; Presidential palace: Taliban insist on continuing ‘killing Afghans’, 22 May 2020], url
2405 NYT, How the Taliban outlasted a superpower: tenacity and carnage, 26 May 2020, url
2406 Reporterly, 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, 2 February 2020, url, p. 94
of 2020\textsuperscript{2410}, and the mentioned source recorded between 76 and 100 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020\textsuperscript{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 data\textsuperscript{2412}](image)

In May 2020, clashes between ANSF and the Taliban took place in Alishang district.\textsuperscript{2413} On 7 July 2020, Khaama Press cited 201\textsuperscript{st} 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.\textsuperscript{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 district\textsuperscript{2415}; 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 NDS\textsuperscript{2416}; 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.\textsuperscript{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 province\textsuperscript{2418}; on 2 May 2020, three civilians were killed in Mehtarlam after a bomb set in a motorcycle went off in front of the prison\textsuperscript{2419}; 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.\textsuperscript{2420}

\subsection*{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

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2410} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69
\item \textsuperscript{2411} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 72
\item \textsuperscript{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{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2413} NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 soldiers, as many Taliban killed in Laghman firefight, 11 May 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2414} Khaama Press, 22 Taliban militants killed, wounded on Kabul-Jalalabad highway, 7 July 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2415} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2416} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2417} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2418} 1TV, Three children killed in blast at funeral in Laghman, 23 December 2019, \url{url}; Tolonews, Three civilians killed in explosion at funeral in Laghman, 23 December 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 30 December 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2419} NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Explosion close to a prison leaves 3 dead in Laghman province of Afghanistan, 2 May 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2420} NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, \url{url}
\end{itemize}
district of Mehtarlam and Bad Pash district), and the remaining 2% were displaced into Panjshir and Parwan provinces.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url} \footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}}}

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.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url} \footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}}}

In December 2019, fighting and military operations continued in several eastern provinces including Laghman province.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 23 December – 29 December 2019, \url{url}, p. 1} During the first week of March 2020, around 2,296 people were displaced due to continued fighting in Alishang, Alingar and Mehterlam districts.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 9 March – 15 March 2020, \url{url}, p. 1} During the entire month of March clashes between ANSF and AGEs in Laghman province were reported.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 16 March – 22 March 2020, \url{url}, p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 23 March – 29 March 2020, \url{url}, p. 1} 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.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 15 – 21 June 2020, \url{url}, p. 2}

### 2.22 Logar

#### 2.22.1 General description of the province

Logar province is located in the central region of Afghanistan, about 65 kilometres south of Kabul,\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Logar Province Background Profile, n.d., \url{url}} and has borders with the provinces of Kabul to the north, Nangarhar to the north-east, Paktia to the
south and south-east, Ghazni to the south-west and Wardak to the west.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2431}

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Logar province has a population of 434 374.\textsuperscript{2432} Most of the province’s population lives in the fertile plains of the Logar Valley.\textsuperscript{2433} The main ethnic groups in Logar are Pashtun, Tajik and Hazara.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2436} In January 2020, the detention of ethnic Pashtun activist Manzoor Pashteen reportedly caused protests in Logar province.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2438} Logar province has no functioning airstrip and air traffic is regularly interrupted by bad weather conditions.\textsuperscript{2439}

UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018 listed Logar province as poppy-free since 2013.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2441}

Logar province is rich in chromite ore, with deposits extracted illegally and smuggled to Pakistan.\textsuperscript{2442} The province also houses the country’s largest copper deposit, the mine of Mes Aynak in Mohammad Agha district.\textsuperscript{2443} Logar’s natural resources have caused local rivalries over revenues coming from mineral deposits.\textsuperscript{2444} Due to shrinking resources, population growth and sedentarisation processes, the

\textsuperscript{2429} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Logar Province - District Atlas, April 2014, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2430} Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Logar, 2020, \url{url}; Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, \url{url}, p. 13
\textsuperscript{2431} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Logar Province - District Atlas, April 2014, \url{url}; Tolonews, Insecurity Hardens Access to Logar’s Azra District, 30 June 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2432} Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, \url{url}, p. 4
\textsuperscript{2433} Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2434} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Logar Provincial Overview, n.d., \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Logar Province Background Profile, n.d., \url{url}; Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2435} Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2436} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Logar Provincial Overview, n.d., \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2437} RFE/RL, Detention of Ethnic Pashtun Activist Triggers Protests in Pakistan, Afghanistan, 28 January 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2438} Ali, Q., The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar’s Struggle Against the Taleban, AAN, 15 December 2014, \url{url}; Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2439} UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, \url{url}, p. 11
\textsuperscript{2440} UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, \url{url}, p. 19
\textsuperscript{2441} Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2443} Tolonews, Logar Security ‘Improves’ after More Forces Deployed, 4 May 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2444} Global Security Review, Are Afghanistan’s Mineral Deposits an Answer to the Country’s Economic Woes?, 9 June 2019, \url{url}
province has witnessed conflicts between nomads and settlers, for example in Azra and Baraki Barak 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 Kabul, 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. 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. 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.

In 2017, the situation in Logar was reported to have worsened, 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. In 2019-2020, Logar is described as among the relatively volatile provinces in the central region of the country, ‘where the Taliban have influence and control’, regularly attacking government forces in both the provincial capital and the districts. 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.

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, p. 27
2446 Giustozzi, A., Nomad Sedentarisation Processes in Afghanistan and Their Impact on Conflict, AREU, September 2019, p. 10
2450 Pajhwok Afghan News, More than 50pc of Logar Being Controlled by Taliban, 26 June 2017, url
2451 Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan’s Organization and Structure, Landinfo, 23 August 2017, p. 6
2452 Khaama Press, Coalition Airstrike Kills Taliban Leader Mullah Amin Gul and His 3 Comrades in Logar, 7 April 2019, url
2453 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
2454 An Afghan analyst Lifos spoke to in January 2020. Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, url, p. 52
with intensive fighting indicating that increasing efforts are needed from the actors in the conflict to hold their terrain.\footnote{Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, url\url{https://www.aan.com/nl/article/57360}}

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.\footnote{Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, url\url{https://www.aan.com/nl/article/57360}} 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.\footnote{LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., url\url{https://www.aan.com/nl/article/57360}} 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.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign Militants Swell Taliban Ranks in Charkh District: Official, 30 April 2019, url\url{https://pajhwok.af/en/articles/761744/Foreign-Militants-Swell-Taliban-Ranks-in-Charkh-District-Official}}

Media sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in the districts of Charkh, Baraki Barak, Mohammad Agha, Khoshi, Kharwar and Azra.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign Militants Swell Taliban Ranks in Charkh District: Official, 30 April 2019, url\url{https://pajhwok.af/en/articles/761744/Foreign-Militants-Swell-Taliban-Ranks-in-Charkh-District-Official}} The area of Charkh district has long been largely Taliban controlled\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign Militants Swell Taliban Ranks in Charkh District: Official, 30 April 2019, url\url{https://pajhwok.af/en/articles/761744/Foreign-Militants-Swell-Taliban-Ranks-in-Charkh-District-Official}} and is described as one of Logar’s most insecure districts.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign Militants Swell Taliban Ranks in Charkh District: Official, 30 April 2019, url\url{https://pajhwok.af/en/articles/761744/Foreign-Militants-Swell-Taliban-Ranks-in-Charkh-District-Official}} 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 militias 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.\footnote{Jackson, A., Perspectives on Peace from Taliban Areas of Afghanistan, USIP, May 2019, url\url{http://www.usip.org/publications/perspectives-peace-taliban-areas-afghanistan}} The Taliban are reported to have established training centres in the district,\footnote{Tolonews, Logar’s Azra District on the Verge of Collapse, 25 June 2019, url\url{https://tolonews.com/en/articles/1001061/Logars-Azra-District-on-the-Verge-of-Collapse}} Arab, Chechen, Uzbek and Pakistani militants (some of them affiliated with Al Qaeda\footnote{Jackson, A., Perspectives on Peace from Taliban Areas of Afghanistan, USIP, May 2019, url\url{http://www.usip.org/publications/perspectives-peace-taliban-areas-afghanistan}}, see below) have reportedly been seen in the Taliban’s ranks in Charkh.\footnote{Tolonews, Logar’s Azra District on the Verge of Collapse, 25 June 2019, url\url{https://tolonews.com/en/articles/1001061/Logars-Azra-District-on-the-Verge-of-Collapse}} However, according to Charkh’s district’s governor, cited by Tolonews in April 2020, the centre of the district is under government control.\footnote{Tolonews, Logar’s Azra District on the Verge of Collapse, 25 June 2019, url\url{https://tolonews.com/en/articles/1001061/Logars-Azra-District-on-the-Verge-of-Collapse}} In June - July 2019, a Taliban...
siege on the eastern district of Azra was reported.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2476} Azra is described as ‘a strategic district’, from where the Taliban could threaten Kabul and other neighbouring provinces.\textsuperscript{2477} In Mohammad Agha district, the village of Surkhab is reported to be the most embattled area.\textsuperscript{2478} An important base for Taliban decision-making is located in Zurmat district of neighboring Paktya province, bordering Logar’s southern district of Kharwar, where Taliban militants from Logar province are reportedly active.\textsuperscript{2479} The Taliban are reportedly involved in disturbing security on the Kabul-Gardez Highway\textsuperscript{2480}, 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.\textsuperscript{2481}

Several prominent Taliban figures were reported to have been killed or arrested in various districts.\textsuperscript{2482} In March 2019, two key Taliban commanders, known as Shafiqullah\textsuperscript{2483} and Abu Zar, reportedly involved in planning high-profile attacks\textsuperscript{2484}, 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.\textsuperscript{2485} In April 2019, three prominent Taliban figures, including Qari Mohammad Yusuf and Mohammad Wali, were arrested\textsuperscript{2486} and Taliban group leader Mullah Amin Gul was killed\textsuperscript{2487} 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.\textsuperscript{2488} However, in August 2019, local officials in Logar claimed Haji Lala was killed in that month.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2491} In November 2019, a prominent Taliban commander known as Waisuddin was killed in Mohammad Agha district.\textsuperscript{2492}

\textsuperscript{2475} Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar’s Azra District on the Verge of Collapse, 25 June 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar: 56 Militants Eliminated in Azra Offensive, 13 July 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2476} Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar’s Azra District on the Verge of Collapse, 25 June 2019, \url{url}; Tolonews, Insecurity Hardens Access to Logar’s Azra District, 30 June 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2477} Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar’s Azra District on the Verge of Collapse, 25 June 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{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{url}.
\textsuperscript{2480} Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Militants Killed, 7 Captured in Logar Operation, 19 June 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2481} Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2482} See sources mentioned below.
\textsuperscript{2483} Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban Commander Identified as Shafiullah Killed in Logar Province, 11 March 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2484} Khaama Press, Taliban’s High-Profile Attack Planner Killed in Logar Airstrike, 21 March 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2485} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Commander Who Killed 10 Police Detained in Logar, 27 March 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2486} Khaama Press, 3 Prominent Taliban Leaders Arrested by Afghan Forces in Logar Province, 26 April 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2487} Khaama Press, Coalition Airstrike Kills Taliban Leader Mullah Amin Gul and His 3 Comrades in Logar, 7 April 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2489} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s Governor for Logar Among 22 Militants Killed, 24 August 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2490} Khaama Press, U.S. Airstrikes Kill Top Taliban Leaders in Logar Province, 16 July 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2492} Tolonews, ‘Taliban Commander’ Killed in Logar Airstrike, 10 November 2019, \url{url}.
According to the UN Security Council, ISKP has tried to expand its influence in the provinces of Logar and Paktia in the past, however without success. 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. 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. 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.

According to the UN Security Council, Al Qaeda is covertly active in 12 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, including in Logar. In August 2019, a dozen Chechen and Chinese fighters, reportedly part of an Al Qaeda network, were killed alongside Taliban militants in Charkh district. 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. 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 Paktia area (including Khost, Logar, Paktika and Paktya provinces) under Hafiz Azizuddin Haqqani’s command.

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 Paktia province. 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. In May 2019, the deployment of additional ANDSF forces in the insecure parts of Logar province was reported.

2494 USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, October 2019, 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
2498 Tolonews, 12 Chechen Fighters Affiliated to Al-Qaida Killed in Afghanistan, 2 August 2019, Khaama Press, Chechen and Chinese Militants Among Dozens Killed, Wounded in Logar Operation, 2 August 2019, url
2499 Pajhwok Afghan News, Mastemind Behind Kabul Bombings Killed, 26 October 2019, url
2501 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, p. 14
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. Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Logar province in the first quarter of 2020 and between 101 and 125 civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020. 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. 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.

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.

![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 data](url)

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 arbaki is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias). Examples of such incidents included assaults on security checkpoints/outposts and headquarters in different areas near the provincial borders.

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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 Rutig, 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,

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2513 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, [url](https://afghanwarcasualties.org/)
2514 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url](https://afghanwarcasualties.org/)
2515 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020 (updated 30 April 2020), [url](https://afghanwarcasualties.org/)
2516 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](https://afghanwarcasualties.org/)
2517 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019 (updated 26 September 2019), [url](https://afghanwarcasualties.org/)
2519 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), [url](https://afghanwarcasualties.org/)
2520 Reuters, Clashes Across Afghanistan Kill Dozens of Security Force Members, Militants, 22 April 2020, [url](https://afghanwarcasualties.org/)
2521 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020 (updated 30 April 2020), [url](https://afghanwarcasualties.org/)
2522 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url](https://afghanwarcasualties.org/)
2523 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020 (updated 30 April 2020), [url](https://afghanwarcasualties.org/)
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](https://acleddata.org/)
2525 Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban Commander Identified as Shafullah Killed in Logar Province, 11 March 2019, [url](https://khaama.com/)
2526 Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 Militants Killed in Logar Offensive, 7 June 2019, [url](https://pajhwok.com/en)
2527 Khaama Press, Taliban Militants Suffer Heavy Casualties in Logar Operations, 8 June 2019, [url](https://khaama.com/)
2528 Khaama Press, Taliban Militants Suffer Heavy Casualties in Special Forces Raid in Logar, 17 June 2019, [url](https://khaama.com/)
2529 Khaama Press, 11 Taliban Militants Killed, 4 Wounded in Special Forces Raid in Logar, 10 May 2020, [url](https://khaama.com/)
2532 Khaama Press, 3 Prominent Taliban Leaders Arrested by Afghan Forces in Logar Province, 26 April 2019, [url](https://khaama.com/)
2534 Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill 11 Taliban Militants, Destroy Weapons Cache in Logar, 21 September 2019, [url](https://khaama.com/)
2535 Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Among Dozens Killed in Latest Military Operations, 8 March 2019, [url](https://khaama.com/)
2537 Tolonews, 12 Chechen Fighters Affiliated to Al-Qa'ida Killed in Afghanistan, 2 August 2019, [url](https://tolonews.com/)
2539 Tolonews, Afghan Forces Launch Operation in Talibain-Held District in Logar, 22 April 2020, [url](https://tolonews.com/)
2540 Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces Destroy Suicide Bombers Training Centre in Logar, 13 August 2019, [url](https://khaama.com/)
such as a CIA-backed operation in the Padkhab area of the provincial capital in May 2019 and an NDS operation in Daudkhel village in the outskirts of Pul-e Alam City in August 2019.

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. While these air/drone strikes mostly inflicted losses among AGEs in the aforementioned districts, 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 2019, an American drone strike targeting a Taliban gathering in the Kamalkhel neighbourhood of Pul-e Alam City killing two children, in July 2019, and an American air strike targeting a tent of Kuchi nomads in the Khaki Dag area of Baraki Barak district, in July 2019. 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.

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. 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. 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. 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. In September 2019, several civilians were killed by Taliban-claimed car bombs and by a bomb detonating near a mosque after Friday prayer in Pul-e Alam district.

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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
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
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
ACLED coded 6% of the violent incidents in Logar as ‘shelling, artillery and missile attacks’. 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 district; in February and March 2020, when mortar shell leftovers exploded in Charkh and Azra districts, killing two children; and in May 2020, when a Taliban-fired mortar landed on a civilian house in Azra district. In June 2020, a rocket fired by the Taliban impacted the provincial hospital in Pul-e Alam district. In July 2020, several mortars were fired at Ashraf Ghani and his delegation when the President visited his home province; no casualties were reported.

ACLED categorised 5% of all reported violent incidents in Logar as ‘violence against civilians’. These incidents involved shootings by unidentified gunmen of a well-known religious scholar in the main mosque of Pul-e Alam in May, of the executive head of Mohammad Agha district also in May, of an appellate court judge for Paktya province in his home in Mohammad Agha district in September, and of a civil society activist in Pul-e Alam in March; Taliban ambushed and killed two engineers working for the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Pul-e Alam City in June; and of several judges and a court staff member in Mohammad Agha district in November; a night raid carried out by Afghan and foreign forces in the Babos area of Pul-e Alam City in August, killing one civilian and wounding four others; the execution of two sisters by the Taliban in Mohammad Agha district in June; the kidnapping and killing of a former senator for Logar province by the Taliban also in June; and the shooting of a female provincial council member in Pul-e Alam in July.

Logar’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 reached around 15%, AAN related Logar’s below average voter registration to the ‘high insecurity’ in the province. At the end of polling day, Minister of Defence Asadullah Khaled mentioned Logar as one of the seven ‘most threatened provinces’ on 28 September. In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 51-75% of respondents in Logar province reported to

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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
2554 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020 (updated 27 February 2020), url
2556 Afghanistan Times, Child killed in Taliban Mortar Attack in Logar, 9 May 2020, url
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
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
have experienced fear while voting.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 madrasas were closed down because they were not in line with the group’s doctrine.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.’\textsuperscript{2581} After the allegations were made public, two activists in Logar were detained by the Afghan intelligence service\textsuperscript{2582} and forced to confess their accusations were untrue\textsuperscript{2583}. After pressure from the US and international human rights groups, the activists were released\textsuperscript{2584} and reportedly left the country short after.\textsuperscript{2585} At the end of January 2020, Afghanistan’s Attorney General’s Office (AOG) opened an investigation.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{2573} Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, url, p. 62  
\textsuperscript{2574} AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, url, p. 11  
\textsuperscript{2575} Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 Killed, 123 Wounded in Election Day Attacks, 28 September 2019, url  
\textsuperscript{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  
\textsuperscript{2577} 1TV, Taliban Force Schools in Central Afghan District to Close, 21 September 2019, url  
\textsuperscript{2578} Tolonews, Taliban Close 29 Government-Sponsored Madrasas in Logar, 17 October 2019, url  
\textsuperscript{2579} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Monthly Humanitarian Update (January 2020), 11 February 2020, url, p. 1  
\textsuperscript{2580} Guardian (The), Afghanistan Paedophile Ring May Be Responsible for Abuse of 500 Boys, 13 November 2019, url  
\textsuperscript{2581} NYT, 3 Afghan Schools, 165 Accounts of Students Being Raped, 25 November 2019, url  
\textsuperscript{2582} Guardian (The), Whistle-blowers on School Paedophile Ring in Afghanistan Arrested, 25 November 2019, url  
\textsuperscript{2583} NYT, U.S. Envoy Says Afghans Coerced Retraction of Rape Allegations, 26 November, url  
\textsuperscript{2584} RFE/RL, Afghanistan Releases Activists Who Exposed Alleged Paedophile Ring, 27 November 2019, url  
\textsuperscript{2585} Guardian (The), Investigation Begins into Alleged Abuse of More Than 500 Boys in Afghanistan, 27 November 2019, url  
\textsuperscript{2586} Guardian (The), Investigation Begins into Alleged Abuse of More Than 500 Boys in Afghanistan, 29 January 2020, url  
\textsuperscript{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.  

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Logar province from other provinces was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020.  

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. During the last two weeks of March 2020, UNOCHA reported on the displacement of approximately 350 families due to conflict in Logar province.

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. 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. 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.
2.23 Nangarhar

2.23.1 General description of the province

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. The provincial capital of Nangarhar is Jalalabad. 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, Kuzkunar, Lalpur, Muhmand Dara, Nazyan, Pachieragam (sometimes spelled ‘Pachir Wa Agam’), Rodat, Sherzad, Shinwar (also known as Ghanikhel) and Surkhrod. The NSIA also mentions a district named Spinghar but defines it as ‘temporary’.

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. The population is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Pashai, Arabs and Tajiks. 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...
to insecurity and government’s indifference. In late September 2018, only 60 families of the community still lived in Nangarhar. According to Afghanistan’s expert Antonio Giustozzi, as of May 2019, there were also about 100 000 nomad families in Nangarhar.

The Regional Highway 05 (RH05) starts from Kabul and passes through the districts of Surkhrod, Jalalabad, Behsud, Rodat, Batikot, Shinwar, Muhmand Dara, before reaching the Afghan-Pakistani border at Torkham. An improvement project of the Kabul-Jalalabad Highway, conducted by a Chinese company, has fallen behind for years, reportedly due to corruption and negligence. 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.

The province, which borders the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan (now merged with Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province), has served as an unofficial crossing-point for local and foreign militants. 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.

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. 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. 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’. Tolonews also reported about the illegal mining of precious and semi-precious stones in Goshta district.

### 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.

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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
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
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 2019,\(^{2623}\) 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
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
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 Nangarhar, 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 districts, while their presence was also reported in the mountainous areas of Achin district. In April 2020, an NDS official quoted by the Diplomat stated that ISKP fighters still hiding in Nangarhar had been left without command centre.

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. 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. 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. The Taliban reportedly set up a system of taxation of smuggling goods across eight of Nangarhar’s southern districts, Hesarak and Sherzad being the local centre of their narcotics activity. 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. 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). Over 2019, UNAMA documented one case of child recruitment by the Taliban in Nangarhar.

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.

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 Pachiragam, 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, Pachiragam and Sherzad.

In May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Nangarhar as one of the twelve provinces where Al Qaeda was ‘covertly active’. UNAMA added that its main tasks consist in ‘training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring’. 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.
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’. 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. Other foreign groups primarily active in Nangarhar include two split factions of Pakistani Jamaat ul-Ahrar (which is itself a splinter group of TTP). One of them, Hizbul Ahrar, was attacked by ANSF in February 2020. 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.

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. 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. 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 Achin), where ‘they appeared to be much more visible and active than the ALP’. 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. Besides, the Q2 unit of NDS Special Forces (‘NDS-Q2’) 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. Finally, in June 2019, the New York Times reported that the US Special Forces held several outposts in Nangarhar.

On their previous attempts to dislodge ISKP, ANDSF had not been able to keep the liberated areas under their control. 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, p. 20
2645 Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, URL
2646 Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, URL
2648 BBC News, Crackdown on militants as US and Afghan Taliban seek deal, 15 February 2020, URL
2649 Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, URL
2650 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, URL
2651 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
2652 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 Talibans], 27 August 2019, URL
2653 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
2654 USDOD, Enhancing Security & Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, URL
2655 HRW, “They’ve Shot Many Like This” Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, URL
2656 NYT, U.S. Special Forces Battle Against ISIS Turns to Containment, and Concern, 14 June 2019, URL
2657 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, Goshla, 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 Heserak 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 over 251 civilian casualties in Nangarhar in the first half of 2020, reporting an increase during the second quarter compared to the first.\(^{2662}\)

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 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.\(^{2666}\)

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\(^{2657}\) Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, 1 March 2020, [url](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 Nangarhar, 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


\(^{2662}\) 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], p. 72


\(^{2664}\) SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url], p. 69

\(^{2665}\) 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

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. 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. In May and June 2020, UNOCHA described the situation as ‘volatile’, with ongoing fighting between the ANDSF and AGEs, causing civilian casualties.

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 %).

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 data

Across these three categories, Khogyani (with the highest ‘Battles’ and ‘Explosions/remote violence’ numbers), Sherzad, Achin and Jalalabad stood as the most as the most violence-affected districts. Between 25 and 50 incidents were recorded in Batikot, Dehbala, Muhmand Dara, Pachieragam, Shinwar and Surkhrod districts, and less than 20 in the remaining ones.

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 violence. ISKP accounted for 12 initiated armed clashes, mostly against the Taliban in Sherzad and...
Dehbalā districts during the summer of 2019, as reported by media sources. 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, Durbāga, Goshta, Kama, Kot, Kuzkunār and Rodat.

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.

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: Khogyāni, Achīn, Dehbalā, Pachieragām and Sherzād. Conversely, based on ACLED data, other Nangarhar’s districts were hardly affected by this type of violence, if at all. Consistently with the US airforce-backed ANDSF operations, 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 Tangī area of Khogyāni 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’.

As for ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’, Jalalabad district recorded the highest numbers (34), followed by Battikot (17) and Khogyāni (16). 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. 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. On 19 August 2019, as people were celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the national independence, ten blasts across Jalalabad injured over 50 persons. On 23 August 2019, a roadside bomb explosion killed one civilian and wounded 14 others in a bazar of Khogyāni district. On 7 October 2019, 11 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.

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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 Achīn, 7 October 2019, url; Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, url
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
2686 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 October – 13 October 2019), 16 October 2019, url
ACLED coded six other events as ‘Suicide bomb’ attacks across five districts (two in Jalalabad).\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2691} These included the killing of 13 civilians in Hesarak, in March 2019\textsuperscript{2692} and of 8 others in Surkhrod, in February 2020, both by US air strikes.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2697}

In its annual report, UNAMA expressed concern over ‘Taliban attacks and actions targeting health facilities and protected personnel’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 similar incident between January and May 2020.\textsuperscript{2700} In January 2020, it was reported that the Taliban had closed all health centres in Sherzad, Hesarak, Khogyani, Surkhrod and Lalpul districts. The group argued that it was a retaliatory measure against the closure of health centres by the authorities in their
areas.\textsuperscript{2701} Fifteen health centres were reopened a month later in Khogyani, Surkhrod, Lalpur, Muhmand Dara and Achin districts, but several others remained closed.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2703} UNAMA also documented a case of ANDSF members threatening the medical personnel of the Khogyani public hospital in April 2020.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2707} Massive waves of displacements in Khogyani and Sherzad districts are linked to ongoing fighting during March–April 2019 (between the Taliban and ISKP)\textsuperscript{2708}, in May–June 2019\textsuperscript{2709}, and in early 2020 (between ANDSF and AGEs).\textsuperscript{2710} Conflict forced over 6,000 people to flee within Surkhrod district in August 2019\textsuperscript{2711}, and displaced several other thousands of people in Muhmand Dara in early January 2020.\textsuperscript{2712} UNOCHA also reported a peak of displacements in November 2019 from Achin to Jalalabad (844)\textsuperscript{2713}, coinciding with the military operations against ISKP that took place in the district.\textsuperscript{2714} Other noted factors of displacement were threats, intimidation and shelling.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2716}

\textsuperscript{2701} Tolonews, Taliban Closes Health Centers In Nangarhar Districts, 21 January 2020, \textsuperscript{url}
\textsuperscript{2702} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (3 February – 9 February 2020), 12 February 2020, \textsuperscript{url}
\textsuperscript{2703} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 August – 11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, \textsuperscript{url}
\textsuperscript{2705} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \textsuperscript{url}, p. 28
\textsuperscript{2706} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \textsuperscript{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \textsuperscript{url}
\textsuperscript{2707} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \textsuperscript{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \textsuperscript{url}
\textsuperscript{2708} UNOCHA, Kunar Conflict - Update (as of 3 April 2019), 4 April 2019, \textsuperscript{url}; Reuters, Heavy fighting flares between Taliban, Islamic State in Afghanistan, 24 April 2019, \textsuperscript{url}
\textsuperscript{2709} Tolonews, Taliban-Daesh Clashes Displace Over 13,000 Families In Nangarhar, 11 June 2019, \textsuperscript{url}
\textsuperscript{2710} UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (3 February – 9 February 2020), 12 February 2020, \textsuperscript{url}
\textsuperscript{2711} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (9 September – 15 September 2019), 18 September 2019, \textsuperscript{url}
\textsuperscript{2712} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (6 January – 12 January 2020), 15 January 2020, \textsuperscript{url}
\textsuperscript{2713} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \textsuperscript{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \textsuperscript{url}
\textsuperscript{2714} Tolonews, Taliban-Daesh Clashes Displace Over 13,000 Families In Nangarhar, 11 June 2019, \textsuperscript{url}
\textsuperscript{2715} Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangrahar, AAN, 1 Marc 2020, \textsuperscript{url}
\textsuperscript{2716} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \textsuperscript{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \textsuperscript{url}
2.24 Nimroz

2.24.1 General description of the province

Map 24: Afghanistan – Nimroz province, source: UNOCHA²⁷¹⁷

²⁷¹⁷ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
Nimroz province is located in the south-west of Afghanistan, alongside the border with Iran and Pakistan.\textsuperscript{2718} The province borders Farah to the north, Helmand to the east, Pakistan to the south and Iran to the west.\textsuperscript{2719} Nimroz is divided into the following districts: provincial capital Zaranj, Kang, Asle-e Chakhsansur, Char Burjak, Khashrod and Dularam.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2721} The population is composed mainly of Balochs, followed by Pashtuns, Tajiks\textsuperscript{2722}, Brahui and Uzbeks.\textsuperscript{2723} Balochs living in Afghanistan are primary nomadic.\textsuperscript{2724}

The province’s topography consists of flat and mostly desert terrain.\textsuperscript{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 livestock\textsuperscript{2726} and suffered from shortages of food and high levels of malnutrition, especially among women and children.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2729} The city of Zaranj hosts an airport, which was served by domestic scheduled passenger flights as of March 2019.\textsuperscript{2730}

The province is of strategic position for smuggling because of its proximity to Iran, Pakistan and Helmand. The Zaranj – Delaram road and the south-western highways have been used as transit routes for drugs trafficking.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{2732} Moreover, Taliban militants purportedly set up checkpoints along the Zaranj-Delaram Highway and charged taxes on vehicles carrying goods.\textsuperscript{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 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.\textsuperscript{2734}

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\textsuperscript{2718} Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{2719} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{2720} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url; Afghanistan NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, url, p. 44
\textsuperscript{2721} Afghanistan NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021 url, p. 44
\textsuperscript{2722} Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{2723} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{2724} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{2725} Pajhwok Afghan News, Nimroz farmers in despair as drought kills livestock, 2 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{2726} Relief International, Saving Lives and Securing Futures in Drought-Stricken Afghanistan, 26 August 2019, url
\textsuperscript{2727} Los Angeles Times, God, gas and heroin. Now, the fight’s over water, 6 February 2020, url
\textsuperscript{2728} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
\textsuperscript{2729} Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
\textsuperscript{2730} IWPR, Drugs Trade Thrives in Afghan Province, 19 February 2018, url
\textsuperscript{2731} Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, url
\textsuperscript{2732} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban running ‘customs check-point’ on Nimroz road, 20 January 2018, url
\textsuperscript{2733} Tolonews, Nimroz Identified As Key Human Trafficking Route, 13 September 2018, url
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. According to UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Nimroz province decreased by 38% in 2019, compared to 2018. All villages in Nimroz producing poppy are paying taxes to Taliban or other anti-governmental elements.

Since 25 March 2020, a lockdown has been introduced in Nimroz due to an increase of COVID-19 cases, mostly imported from neighbouring Iran. A curfew has been imposed and the border crossing point has been closed. Food import from Iran has been stopped.

### 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. 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. 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. 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.

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.

### 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 by ground engagements and explosive remnants of war. Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Nimroz during both the first and second quarters of 2020.

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2735 IWPR, Drugs Trade Thrives in Afghan Province, 19 February 2018, url;
2736 BD News, More Afghan women find solace in drugs as coronavirus, migration upends life, 03 April 2020, url;
2737 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018 – socio-economic report, July 2019, url, p. 63-64;
2739 The National, Afghanistan’s doctors brace for impact as first positive coronavirus case detected, 25 February 2020, url;
2740 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, url, p. 13;
2742 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.;
2743 Le Figaro, En Afghanistan, l’Iran accroît son aide aux talibans, 19 September 2018, url, p. 31;
2744 RFE/RL, Talibans Infighting Leaves Dozens Of Militants Dead In Afghanistan, 30 November 2018, url;
2745 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94;
2746 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 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.\(^{2748}\)

![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 data\(^{2749}\)](image)

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.’\(^{2755}\)

According to ACLED data, three civilians were killed in Kashrod district by NATO and Afghan military forces on 22 August and 8 December 2019.\(^{2756}\)

\(^{2748}\) 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

\(^{2756}\) 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
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 Shahraq district to Khashrod district.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2759} On 19 January 2020, five Taliban insurgents were killed by NATO drone raids in Khashrod.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2762} Local officials claimed that in Khashrod seven Taliban fighters were also killed.\textsuperscript{2763}

\subsection*{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.\textsuperscript{2764} Displacement in the province in the reporting period was induced by conflict and droughts.\textsuperscript{2765}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2757} SATP, Nimroz: Timeline – 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{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{url}
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\item \textsuperscript{2762} Voice of Jihad, 2 killed as APC destroyed in Nimroz, 16 April 2020, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 30 April 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2763} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 30 April 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2764} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 28 June 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2765} Relief International, Saving Lives and Securing Futures in Drought-Stricken Afghanistan, 26 August 2019, \url{url}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
2.25 Nuristan

2.25.1 General description of the province

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. RFE/RL's Gandhara noted that it was ‘more closely joined’ with its southern neighbours. 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. According to local residents interviewed by the magazine The Diplomat, Waygal district’s actual name is Want.

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').

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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]
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.\textsuperscript{2772} It is composed mainly of Nuristani, with smaller Pashai, Pashtuns, Gujars, Tajiks, Pashtuns\textsuperscript{2773} and Pashai communities.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2776} An international NGO interviewed by LIFOS stated that it was difficult for outsiders – both militants and civilians – to settle in Nuristan.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2778} Some of them may be completely inaccessible in winter due to floods or snowfalls.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2781} Although the Diplomat described Nuristan as ‘mostly neglected’ by the Afghan government since 2001,\textsuperscript{2782} 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 May and, according to a former executive of the National Security Council, was still underway in November.\textsuperscript{2783} In June, the local authorities began to expand a paved road from Parun to the remote districts of Kamdesh and Barg-e-Matal.\textsuperscript{2784}

There is no functioning airstrip in Nuristan.\textsuperscript{2785} 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.\textsuperscript{2786} 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.\textsuperscript{2787}

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\bibitem{2774} Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Nuristan, n.d., \url{url}
\bibitem{2775} Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, \url{url}
\bibitem{2776} MEI, Social Change in Eastern Nuristan, 23 December 2012, \url{url}
\bibitem{2777} Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (version 2.0), 07/04/2020, \url{url}, p. 42
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\end{thebibliography}
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 Inqilabi-ye 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 Isami and Jamiat-e Isami in 1997 forced him to flee the province, where the Hezb-e Isami eventually became more influential. 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.

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. 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.

In June 2020, AAN’s expert Obaid Ali stated that ISKP was ‘likely present’ in parts of Nuristan province. It has reportedly been the case since 2016, when many of its fighters (including foreigners) came to the province, pushed out of neighbouring Nangarhar. According to the BICC report, ISKP first established in Waygal and Barg-e-Matal districts in late 2015 or early 2016. In June 2017, a governmental source quoted by AAN reported ISKP presence in the districts of Mandol, Duab, Nurgeram, Waygal and Wama. The US Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) stated that ISKP launched attacks in Nuristan in 2017, but endured significant losses in this province the following year.

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2792 Diplomat (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: ‘This War Will Never End Here’, 13 June 2019, 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. 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. 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. As of August 2019, ISKP was reportedly recruiting fighters in Nuristan, with the support of Salafi enclaves in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan. Some local clerics also accepted to spread ISKP’s message, out of fear of reprisals. 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.

As of May 2020, Nuristan was listed by the UN Security Council as one of the twelve provinces were 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. 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’. Already in 2012, Nuristan had been described as a stronghold Al Qaeda. In 2018-2019, it was said to operate training camps in the province.

While the Taliban have denied that Al Qaeda was fighting along them, 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. 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’. As of 2016, along with Salafi group Jama’ai 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.

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. According to a local lawmaker, the Afghan National Police and the Afghan Local Police

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2799 Telegraph (The), Taliban claim to be preparing onslaught to drive Islamic State from Afghan stronghold, 7 August 2018, [url].
2800 National (The), Taliban prepare ‘decisive’ anti-ISIS operation in eastern Afghanistan, 5 August 2018, [url].
2801 Defesa & Securizezza, Afghanistan, i talebani si preparano a cacciare Isis da Nangharar, 8 August 2018, [url].
2802 Sarwary, B. [Twitter], posted on : 3 May 2019, [url].
2804 Ariana News, [unofficial translation: Rising concerns on the recruitment of fighters by Daesh in Nooristan], 24 August 2019, [url].
2805 taz, „Islamischer Staat“ und Taliban : Der afghanische Terrorwettbewerb : [Islamic State’ and Taliban: the Afghan terror competition], 1 February 2018, [url].
2806 Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, BICC, June 2017, [url], p. 22.
2807 RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Province Looks To Islamic Schools To Prevent Youth From Joining Militants, 8 November 2019, [url].
2810 LWJ, Bin Laden advised relocation of some leaders to Afghanistan due to drone strikes in Waziristan, 3 May 2012, [url].
2811 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].
2812 LWJ, Female Pakistani Taliban suicide bomber hits hospital, 21 July 2019, [url].
are in insufficient numbers in Nuristan. 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. 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. According to AAN’s Kate Clark, in 2017, the NDS-04 unit numbered 250 men trained by US Special Forces.

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. In January 2020, French daily newspaper Le Figaro described Nuristan as ‘a virtually inaccessible Taliban stronghold’, 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’. 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. 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 2019), 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.

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. 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). 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. 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.

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. 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 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2019, p. 94
2826 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2019, p. 75
2827 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, p. 72 At the time of writing, UNAMA provincial data for 2020 was not available.
2828 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, 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. However, at the end of 2019 and in January 2020, UNOCHA reported ongoing fighting in ‘various districts’ of several eastern provinces, among which Nuristan. 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. Afghan security officials also reported increasing Taliban military activity between March and May 2020 in eastern Afghanistan, particularly in Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan. UNOCHA confirmed that fighting continued in Nuristan and other eastern provinces in early May 2020, although it did not specifically mention the Taliban.

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%).

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. 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. Such events include a Taliban attack on the Afghan military in April 2019, in Nurgeram, resulting in the killing of 13 assailants. In October 2019, the Taliban briefly took over
an ALP outpost in the Pasha Gul area of Nuristan district, killing six police officers. Moreover, Taliban attacks on Waygal’s district centre in April 2019 and in April 2020 were repulsed. Regarding the most recent one, Tolonews reported on Twitter that ‘hundreds’ of Taliban fighters had been involved. Over the course of 2019, State news agency Bakhtar News also reported several clashes involving the border police and the Taliban or other AGEs, some of them being purportedly Pakistani. Most of them took place in the frontier area of Kamdesh district.

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.

Over the reporting period, the two recorded events of violence against civilians were documented by Taliban’s Voice of Jihad. In one instance, Afghan forces were accused of randomly firing at civilians and injuring one in Waygal district in April 2019. 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.

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. By June 2019, another dozen of clinics run by an Afghan aid organisation in Duab, Mandol, Nuristan, 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. In November 2019, one the three health centres closed due to insurgent threats was reopened. Other NGO-run health centres had to close because of ongoing fighting in 2020. In August 2019, a polio immunisation campaign was disrupted in some NSAG-controlled areas of Nuristan and other eastern provinces.

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

\[\text{References:} 2840\text{ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 ALP personnel killed in Nuristan [sic] attack, 17 October 2019, url.} \\
\text{2841 Diplomat (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: 'This War Will Never End Here', 13 June 2019, url.} \\
\text{2842 Afghanistan Times (The) [Twitter], posted on: 8 April 2020, url; Tolonews [Twitter], posted on: 8 April 2020, url;} \\
\text{2843 Sarwary, B. [Twitter], posted on: 8 April 2020, url} \\
\text{2844 Tolonews [Twitter], posted on: 8 April 2020, url} \\
\text{2845 Bakhtar News, Border Policemen Shelling on Taliban in Nooristan, 12 May 2019, url} \\
\text{2847 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), url.} \\
\text{2848 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), url.} \\
\text{2849 Voice of Jihad, نورستان: واند وايکلي کي د دينمن توبونه 3 کلیوال زویل، 23 خاروي وونیل} \\
\text{2850 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 ALP personnel killed in Nuristan [sic] attack, 17 October 2019, url.} \\
\text{2851 Diplomat (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: 'This War Will Never End Here', 13 June 2019, url.} \\
\text{2852 UNAMA, Midyear Update On The Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict: 1 January To 30 June 2019, 30 July 2019, url, p. 5} \\
\text{2855 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5-11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, url.} \]
security forces could not ensure their protection. Twenty polling centres (about a third of the provincial total number) were supposed to be kept closed in Nuristan.

### 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. 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. 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.

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. Most of them fled Kunar’s Chapadara district in March and April 2019, where the Taliban and ISKP were then reportedly clashing.

Although UNAMA data does not reflect this information, in September 2019, Gandhara reported that some Nuristani civilians had taken shelter in Kunar and Nangarhar.

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2860 RFE/RL/Gandhara, Insecurity Prompts Thousands To Flee Homes In Eastern Afghan Province, 13 September 2019, [url](https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/insecurity-prompts-thousands-to-flee-homes-in-eastern-afghan-province/)


2863 RFE/RL/Gandhara, Insecurity Prompts Thousands To Flee Homes In Eastern Afghan Province, 13 September 2019, [url](https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/insecurity-prompts-thousands-to-flee-homes-in-eastern-afghan-province/)
2.26 Paktika

2.26.1 General description of the province

Map 26: Afghanistan – Paktika province, source: UNOCHA\textsuperscript{2864}

\textsuperscript{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, Paktya 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 Paktya is Sharan. The province is divided into the following administrative units: Bermel, Dila (also Khushamand), Gomal, Gyan, Janikhel, Matakhán, Naka, Omna, Sarobi, Sarrawzah, Sharan, Turwo, Urgun, Wazakah, Wormamay, Yahyakhel, Yosukhel, Zarghunshahr (also Khairkot) 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. Paktya 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 Paktya 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 Sharan 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 Paktya, primarily in Urgun and Bermel districts.2873

The National Highway 11 (‘NH11’) connects Ghazni province to Paktya’s Sharan and continues to Paktya’s Zurmat.2874 As of December 2018 the Ghazni-Paktya 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 Paktya’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 Paktya 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
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.  

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Paktya has maintained poppy-free status since 2014.  

### 2.26.2 Conflict background and actors in Paktika

In some parts of Paktika, such as Yahyakhel district, 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’. 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. In July 2019, intra-Taliban clashes in Gyan district suggested potential internal dissensions.

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.

In December 2019, Pajhwok reported that a Taliban training centre had been destroyed by the Afghan security forces in Wazakhah district. Nonetheless, in April 2020, a Taliban spokesman published pictures of a training camp, named Tariq bin Ziyad Camp, in Paktika. The Taliban have also been able to send fighters from Pakistan’s Waziristan to several provinces, including Paktika, from their ‘transit hub’ in Zabul.

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 extorsion.

In April 2020, Long War Journal described Paktika as ‘a bastion of the Haqqani Network’. The group started to expand in Loya Paktya some years before 2011, 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. As of June 2019, according to Afghan officials quoted in a UN Security Council report, 1 800 – 2 000 fighters of the network were...

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2881 UNODC and Afghanistan, *MCN*, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018*, November 2018, [url](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](url); Muzhary, F., *The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling*, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](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](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](url)
2885 Khaama Press, *Clashes reported among Taliban militants in Paktika province, 16 July 2019*, [url](url)
2887 Pajhwok Afghan News, *7 Taliban killed in Paktika operations, 19 December 2019*, [url](url)
2888 LWJ, *Taliban tout more elite ‘Red Unit’ fighter training on social media, 8 April 2020*, [url](url)
2891 LWJ, *Taliban tout more elite ‘Red Unit’ fighter training on social media, 8 April 2020*, [url](url)
2892 Clark, K., *2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktya and why the US preferred warlords*, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url](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 203rd 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
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
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.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 53, 56, 58, 65, 74, 84} 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 2018\footnote{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.}) had been accused of extrajudicial killings of civilians, collective punishment and retaliatory killings from 2008 to early 2010.\footnote{SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, url, p. 69}

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, Sarrawahz, Sharan and Zarghunshahr districts are listed as government-controlled or undetermined.\footnote{Tolnews, Who Was Commander Karwan Of Paktika?, 29 June 2018, url} While LWJ claimed that Dila district had been overrun in July 2019\footnote{UNAMA, Midyear Update on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 June 2019, 30 July 2019, url, p. 3} the UN Secretary General stated that the takeover had only been temporary.\footnote{SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, url, p. 69} 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.\footnote{Khaama Press, Clashes reported among Taliban militants in Paktika province, 16 July 2019, url} 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, Khairkot (Zarghunshahr), Urgun and Yahyakhel.\footnote{SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, url, p. 69}

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.\footnote{Tolonews, Who Was Commander Karwan Of Paktika?, 29 June 2018, url} 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’.\footnote{Clark, K., CIA-proxy militias, CIA-drones in Afghanistan: “Hunt and kill” déjà vu, AAN, 26 October 2017, url} 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.\footnote{UNOCHA, Situation Report: AAN, 13 November 2018, url}

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.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94} In July 2019, Afghan news agency Khaama stated that ‘the security situation in Paktika province [had] deteriorated during the recent months.’\footnote{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.} Moreover, UNOCHA reported that in December 2019, Paktika was among ‘the top
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. 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. Nevertheless, on polling day, mortar grenades were launched near polling sites in Paktika, Paktya and Kunar provinces.

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%).

![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 data](url)

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 Wazaklah, Dila, Ziruk, Sarobi, Janikhel, Zarghunshahr, Yusufkhal, 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).

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. Taliban attacks mainly focused on Sarrawzah, Sharan and Matakhan districts and only targeted ANDSF, except for one intra-Taliban clash in July 2019. 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

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2919 RFE/RL, ‘Ample Opportunities’ For Fraud Bedevil Afghan Presidential Election, 9 October 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]
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 Khaama Press, Clashes reported among Taliban militants in Paktika province, 16 July 2019, [url]
Sharan and 7 in Wazakhah. Examples of such incidents include two police raids ending in the killing of seven Taliban in Wazakhah and Sarobi districts, in December 2019. During the second quarter of 2019, Sarobi district police chief was injured by unidentified gunmen in the bazaar of Urgun district. In June 2019, Bermel police district chief was killed by the Taliban.

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, the two most represented subcategories 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). 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. The most lethal strikes took place in Worramay district, when about 105 Taliban fighters were reportedly killed over two consecutive days, in September 2019, although the group denied that it had lost that many members. In December 2019, six members of the Haqqani Network were killed in an air strike in Bermel.

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. 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. In November 2019, at least seven civilians were killed when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb in Sarrawzah district. The Taliban were also held responsible for three grenade attacks across the province. The most recent one happened in Zarghunshar (Khairkot) district, on 3 May 2020, when a hand grenade thrown into a mosque wounded 20 worshipers.

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. In March 2019, at least seven persons were killed by the Afghan police in Bermel. The New York Times reported that on 24 May 2019, ten civilians were killed in Naka district.

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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. 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 Khosht 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’.

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.

Taliban acts of violence against civilians include the killing of three civilians (including a child) in Zarghunshar district, in May 2020.

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.

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. Besides, according to the World Health Organization, four health care providers were killed in Paktika between January and November 2019.

### 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 Khosht province, 86% found refuge within the province. 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. In several reports from late 2019 and early 2020, UNOCHA suggested that ongoing conflict was responsible for many displacements in Paktika.

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.
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 Karzai 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


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

2959 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, url, p. 22

2960 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, url, p. 22

2961 Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, url

2962 Khan P. & Ruttig, T., The 2018 Election Observed (1) in Zurmat, Paktia: Real voting only in the district centre, AAN, 29 October 2018, url

2963 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
According to the NSIA, the population of Paktya is estimated at 611,952 for 2020/21 and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Tajiks. 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. 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.

The Kabul–Gardez Highway connects the provincial capital to Kabul City crossing through Logar. Another highway, called the G-K or Gardez-Khost Highway, passes through the districts of Shawak and Zadran as well as through Khost province, and reaches the road leading to Ghulam Khan at the Afghan-Pakistani border. 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.

In July 2018, Taliban militants were reported to search vehicles and look for government employees on the Gardez-Kabul Highway, abduct civilians and attack officials convoys. Moreover, the Ghazni-Paktya Highway was closed by Taliban militants after fights with the Afghan security forces in Ghazni province, in May 2018. 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 Jaimaydan district. For the previous five years, the highway had been under the influence of the Taliban and the Haqqani Network.

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. 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.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Paktya has maintained its poppy-free status since 2013.

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2963 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url], p. 4
2965 Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, [url]
2966 BBC News, [The only survivor of the Sikh minority in Paktya: I don’t want to leave my city], 6 October 2019, [url]
2971 Khaama Press, Taliban militants kidnap 22 passengers from Kabul–Gardez highway, 31 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]
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. The province is home to many ex-mujahideen commanders who were members of the Harakat-e 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. 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.

Although Paktya province is witnessing an active insurgency, 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.’ The fact that the hostility of ‘even a minor community’ would be counterproductive for the AGEs ‘discourages acts that would antagonise whole communities’. For instance, in June 2018 Gardez City hosted a pro-peace gathering with tribal elders from Paktya, Paktika and Khosh provinces, who pleaded the Taliban to agree to an extended ceasefire. 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.

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. In Zurmat district, a strategic ‘transit corridor’ for fighters from Pakistan to Ghazni, 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.

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2979 Ruttig, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, url.
2980 Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, url.
2981 Ruttig, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, url
2982 See also: Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, url.
2983 Ruttit, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, url.
2984 Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, url.
2986 Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, url.
2987 Salaam Times, Hundreds of Taliban refuse to return to battlefield following ceasefire, 3 July 2018, url.
2989 Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, url.
In October 2018, AAN’s Thomas Ruttig described Paktya province as a ‘Taliban stronghold’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2990} At least in Zurmat district, Pakistani and Central Asian fighters have been reported to fight within Taliban ranks.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 extorsion.\textsuperscript{2993} The Taliban have also been reported to collect taxes from truck drivers going from Paktya to Ghazni.\textsuperscript{2994}

The Haqqani Network started to expand in Loya Paktya some years before 2011\textsuperscript{2995} and has now become powerful in Paktya province.\textsuperscript{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 Talib Pakhtoon (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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{2999} Among these foreign AGEs, the UN Security Council listed the TTP, with 3 500 fighters across Kunar, Paktya and Paktika provinces\textsuperscript{3000}, and Al Qaeda, said to number 400 to 600 fighters across 12 provinces and to be ‘covertly active’ in Paktya.\textsuperscript{3001} UNAMA added that its main tasks consist in ‘training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring’.\textsuperscript{3002}
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 203rd 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 O1 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 Zadran 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-Qaïda 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).\footnote{AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, \url{URL}} 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.\footnote{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{URL}}

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 %).\footnote{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{URL}}

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.\footnote{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{URL}}

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.\footnote{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{URL}} 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.\footnote{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{URL}} On 29 May 2020, despite the extension of the Eid ceasefire, Taliban fighters killed 14 border
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 March\(^{3028}\) 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

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\(^{3023}\) 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](https://armedconflictdata.org/)


\(^{3025}\) 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](https://armedconflictdata.org/)


\(^{3028}\) 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](https://armedconflictdata.org/)


\(^{3030}\) 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](https://armedconflictdata.org/)

\(^{3031}\) 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](https://armedconflictdata.org/)
provincial governor headquarters.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3036}

The Taliban were held responsible for six events of violence against civilians by ACLED.\textsuperscript{3037} These included the murder of tribal elders in August 2019 and June 2020, respectively in Zadran\textsuperscript{3038} and Jaji (Alikhel) district.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3043} The day after the election, a truck driver carrying ballot boxes to Gardez was injured by the Taliban in Zurmat district.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3045} Overall, the main districts of origin of IDPs were Sayedkaram (798), Zurmat (567), Alikhel (497) and Janikhel (343). The four of them

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\textsuperscript{3034} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url; p. 64
\textsuperscript{3035} Ruttit, 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
\textsuperscript{3036} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 57-58, 64
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{3038} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3039} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{3040} Pajhwok Afghan News, Rising targeted killings spark concerns in Gardez, 16 June 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3041} Pajhwok Afghan News, Medical supplies to Paktia clinics yet to resume, 30 January 2020, url
\textsuperscript{3042} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (10 February – 16 February 2020), 19 February 2020, url
\textsuperscript{3043} Bjelica, J. and Ruttit, T., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (11): A first look at how E-Day went, AAN, 28 September 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3044} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Special Report : 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, url, p. 5
\textsuperscript{3045} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
\end{flushleft}
accounted for almost 90% of Paktya’s IDPs.\textsuperscript{3046} UNAMA attributed the displacements recorded in July-August 2019 to insecurity.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3049}

\section*{2.28 Panjsher}

\subsection*{2.28.1 General description of the province}

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.\textsuperscript{3051} Nearly the entire province consists of mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain\textsuperscript{3052}, located between the southern and south-eastern Hindu Kush mountain ranges.\textsuperscript{3053} The province is divided into the following administrative units:

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\textsuperscript{3046} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{3047} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 - 11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3048} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{3049} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{3050} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Panjsher Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
\textsuperscript{3051} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Panjsher Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
\textsuperscript{3052} Afghanistan, MRRD, National Area Based Development Program - Panjshir Provincial Profile, n.d., url, p. 1
\textsuperscript{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.\footnote{Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Panjshir, 2020, \url{url}; Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, \url{url}, p. 17}

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Panjshier province has a population of 169,926.\footnote{Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, \url{url}, p. 4} The main ethnic group in the province is Tajik.\footnote{NYT, Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, \url{url}} Other groups present include a minority of Hazara, Pashai, Nuristani and Ghilzai Pashtun.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghanistan's Beautiful 'Green Zone' Offers Emeralds, Peace, 23 May 2017, \url{url}} A very small population of Kuchi is also reported to reside in Panjshier.\footnote{EASO COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION REPORT: AFGHANISTAN - SECURITY SITUATION}

A road passing through Bagram district of neighbouring Parwan province connects Panjshier with Kabul.\footnote{Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, \url{url}} The distance between Kabul and Bazarak is about 150 kilometres.\footnote{Tagesspiegel (Der), Das Panjshrital in Afghanistan: Mit dem Stolz der Löwen, 4 March 2015, \url{url}} The deep and narrow gorge at the beginning of the Panjshier Valley, described as ‘tailor-made for obstruction and ambush’, has kept the province isolated and difficult to access.\footnote{Foschi, F. et al., The Myth of ‘Afghan Black’ (2): The Cultural History of Hashish Consumption in Afghanistan, AAN, 10 January 2019, \url{url}} Panjshier province has no functioning airstrip and air traffic is regularly interrupted by bad weather conditions.\footnote{Fox News, Afghanistan’s Beautiful ‘Green Zone’ Offers Emeralds, Peace, 23 May 2017, \url{url}}

According to UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018, Panjshier province has maintained its poppy-free status since 2013.\footnote{UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, \url{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 Panjshier province) and the central highlands.\footnote{UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, \url{url}, p. 11} Together with Balkh, Panjshier province is reportedly famous for its high quality Afghan hashish or chars, also known as shirak. According to AAN Shirak-e Panjshier has become ‘the most sought-after and expensive product on the Afghan market’.\footnote{Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, \url{url}}

2.28.2 Conflict background and actors in Panjshier

Certain regions in Afghanistan, like Panjshier province\footnote{Fox News, Afghanistan’s Beautiful ‘Green Zone’ Offers Emeralds, Peace, 23 May 2017, \url{url}; Tolonews, Local Forces Mobilize to Purge Taliban Threats in Panjshier, 2 August 2019, \url{url}; NYT, At a Maternity Center Near a War Zone, 20 Births in One Day, 12 September 2019, \url{url}} and the area of the central highlands, have been described as relatively safe and less affected by conflict-driven violence.\footnote{UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, \url{url}} According to an Afghan military expert cited by Tolonews, the relative stability of Panjshier 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.\footnote{National (The), Fears of Violence and Fraud Hang over Afghan Presidential Election, 26 September 2019, \url{url}; An information organisation Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerheds situation og konfliktsituation i 2019, 22 January 2020, \url{url}, p. 13; Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, \url{url}, pp. 12, 51}

Panjshier 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 Panjshier, who fought against the Soviets and headed the Northern Alliance against the Taliban.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Panjsher Province Background Profile, n.d., \url{url}} In September 2019,
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-controlled 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 Zulfiqar, was killed in Nejrab district of Kapisa province. Zulfiqar 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 Tahir 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
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 Panjsher Province, 4 August 2019, url
3078 Tolonews, Local Forces Mobilize to Purge Taliban Threats in Panjshir, 2 August 2019, url; LWJ, Taliban Threatens Panjsher Province, 4 August 2019, url
3079 Ariana 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, Panjsher Is threatened by ISIS Recruitment, 8 March 2018, url
1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED. In a 2020 USIP report, analyst Borhan Osman mentioned Panjsher as an area where ISKP has been recruiting for its Kabul cell.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Panjsher is under the responsibility of the 201st 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.

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. Resolute Support 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.

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.

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. The incident categorised as ‘violence against civilians’ was reported as a Taliban gunfire attack.

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 data

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. The incident categorised as ‘violence against civilians’ was reported as a Taliban gunfire attack.

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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.\textsuperscript{3090} The incident categorized as ‘explosions/remote violence’ was reported as a rocket attack by unidentified militants on Bazarak City, in August 2019.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3092}

Panjsher’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 reached around 25 \%.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3094}

In June 2019, the Kabul-Panjsher Highway was reportedly closed in Onaba (Anawa) district by protesters demanding the release of an arrested criminal.\textsuperscript{3095}

\section*{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.\textsuperscript{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 district\textsuperscript{3097} in April, May and August 2019 found refuge in Panjsher’s Bazarak district. A small number of 49 IDPs from Dawlatshah district\textsuperscript{3098} in Laghman province found refuge in Panjsher’s Rukha district in April 2019.\textsuperscript{3099}

Additionally, UNOCHA reported on displaced families from Tala Wa Barfak district in Baghlan province seeking shelter in Panjsher in June 2019.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3102}

\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{3092} Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Rockets Land in Panjsher, Causing No Casualties, 13 July 2019, url

\textsuperscript{3093} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, url, p. 98

\textsuperscript{3094} Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, url, p. 62

\textsuperscript{3095} Bakhtar News, Rocket Attacks on Panjshir Province, 20 August 2019, url

\textsuperscript{3096} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url

\textsuperscript{3097} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 11 June 2019, url, p. 1

\textsuperscript{3098} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 11 June 2019, url, p. 1

\textsuperscript{3099} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url

\textsuperscript{3100} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 11 June 2019, url, p. 1

\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{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

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 Bamyan to the west. More than two thirds of the province consists of mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain. 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.

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Parwan province has a population of 737,700. 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. Shinwari district has a Pashtun majority and Ghorband district a significant Pashtun population, as well as Koh-e Safi district. Parwan’s Hazara mainly reside in the districts of Shekhali and Surkh-e Parsa. According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig,
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. Restauration projects are being assessed by the government.3126 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, Jibalus 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 Pashtuns, 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

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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]
3117 USAID, Salang Tunnel Substation Overview, 5 December 2019, [url]; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url], p. 147; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url], p. 147
3119 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url], p. 19
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-Baymaan 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 Sanglah 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 Shinwari\(^{3128}\), Ghorband (or Siya Gird)\(^{3129}\), Saydkhel\(^{3130}\) and Koh-i 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 madrasas 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, 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, 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


\(^{3139}\) 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3141} In a 2020 USIP report, analyst Borhan Osman mentioned Ghorband district as an area where ISKP has been recruiting for its Kabul cell.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3144} Parwan’s Bagram district hosts Bagram Airbase, the largest NATO military base in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3148} Resolute Support\textsuperscript{3149} 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 were 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.\textsuperscript{3150} In the second quarter of 2020, Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Parwan province.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{3140} RFE/RL, No Casualties in Rocket Attack on Largest U.S. Afghan Base, 9 April 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{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{url}
\textsuperscript{3142} Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join ISKP, USIP, June 2020, \url{url}, pp. 4, 11-12
\textsuperscript{3143} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 13
\textsuperscript{3144} Clark, K., CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitaries Accused of Grave Abuses: New Human Rights Watch Report, AAN, 31 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{3145} LWJ, Taliban Suicide Bomber Kills 3 Czech Soldiers, 5 August 2018, \url{url}; Rutting, T., First Breakthrough Toward Peace? A Look at the Seven-Day ‘Reduction of Violence’, AAN, 17 February 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{3146} NYT, A Growing U.S. Base Made This Afghan Town. Now It’s Dying., 12 January 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{3147} Pajhwok Afghan News, Feeling Unsafe, Traders & Well-Off Persons Flee Parwan, 1 December 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{3148} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 94
\textsuperscript{3149} Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.
\textsuperscript{3150} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69
\textsuperscript{3151} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{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

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 arbak 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

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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, Afghan Forces Recovered Weapons, Explosives 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. These involved operations in Charikar district in April and September 2019, killing a Taliban commander and several other militants. Two civilians were also reported killed in the April operation in two villages on the outskirts of Charikar City. In Bagram district, five Taliban militants, reportedly planning IED emplacements, were killed in an ANDSF raid in April 2019 and a proclaimed Taliban attack coordinator was killed during an operation in June 2019. In Ghorband district, 40 Taliban militants were reportedly killed during an operation of the Afghan Special Forces in July 2019.

ACLED coded 20% of the violent incidents in Parwan as ‘shelling, artillery and missile attacks’. For example in May 2019, the Taliban fired several missiles at the US military base of Bagram. In April 2020, an ISKP-claimed rocket attack shelled the same base. In May 2020, several missiles were fired at transmission towers in the Gul Ghondi area of Charikar City. 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.

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented 17% of all reported security incidents in Parwan. For example in April 2019, a Taliban-claimed vehicle-borne (VB) IED attack close to Bagram Airbase killed and injured several American service members. Near the same military base in Bagram district, car bomb explosions were reported in August and in March 2020. In August 2019, the platoon commander of a special unit was killed in a magnetic bomb blast in the second police district of Charikar. 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. In May 2020, explosives detonated at the site of an ANDSF raid in Charikar City.

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 Ghorrband (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 districts\(^{3185}\), 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 2019\(^{3188}\), 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 2020\(^{3189}\); the killing of six local contractors working at Bagram Airbase in April 2020\(^{3190}\); 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 worshippers\(^{3192}\); 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

1181 Khaama Press, Airstrikes Kill 8 Taliban Militants in Takhar, Wardak and Parwan Provinces, 13 July 2019, url
1182 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
1183 Khaama Press, Airstrikes Kill 8 Taliban Militants in Takhar, Wardak and Parwan Provinces, 13 July 2019, url
1184 Voice of Jihad, War Crimes of the Foreign Occupying Forces and Their Internal Mercenaries (November 2019), 4 December 2019, url
1185 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
1186 RFE/RL, Afghan GovernmentOfficial Shot and Killed in Kabul, 13 October 2019, url
1187 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
1189 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 21 May 2020, url
1191 Tolonews, Tribal Elder Killed in Attack by Unknown Gunmen in Parwan, 11 June 2020, url
1192 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, url, p. 98
1193 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, url, p. 62
1196 Al Jazeera, Taliban Suicide Attacks Kill at least 48 before Afghan Elections, 17 September, url
1197 Guardian (The), Taliban Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan Leave Dozens Dead, 17 September 2019, url
gatherings as they were considered military targets'. The Taliban claimed to have blocked roads and attacked security forces personnel transporting election material the day before polling day in Parwan. 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 district and a clash in the provincial capital Charikar City resulting in the killing of one individual. 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. 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. After the mediation from tribal elders, they were released in December 2019.

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. 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.

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.

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 Faryab province in May and July 2019 and found refuge in Parwan’s Charikar district. Smaller numbers of people displaced from the provinces of Kapisa (Tagab district), Kunduz (Chardara and Alabad districts), Badakhshan (Kuran Wa Munjan district), Baghlan (Nahrin district), Kunar (Shigal Wa Sheltan district) and Laghman (Dawlatshah district) found refuge in Parwan’s Charikar, Bagram and Jabalus Saraj districts.

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.

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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
3206 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Free 8 Election Workers in Parwan, 9 December 2019, 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

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. The provincial capital of Samangan is Samangan City, formerly known and still often referred to as Aybak.

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. Ethnic groups present in Samangan province are Tajiks, Uzbeks, Pashtuns, Hazaras, Arabs, Tatars and Aimaq.

The province lies strategically, to the north of the Hindu Kush. 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.

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3215 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Samangan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
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
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.\textsuperscript{3223} By December 2019 provincial council members and truck drivers accused both security forces and Taliban from extorting money.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3225} According to The Liaison Office (TLO), Dane 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3227}

\section*{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3229} Taliban claims of having taken control over the district on 27 September 2019 were denied by a local government official\textsuperscript{3230}, 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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’.\textsuperscript{3234}

According to governmental sources quoted by Pajhwok Afghan News in April 2018, ‘dozens’ of illegal armed groups were active in Samangan\textsuperscript{3235}, as were pro-government militias.\textsuperscript{3236}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{3223} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban increase tax on coal trucks in Samangan, 29 October 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{3224} Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces, Taliban extort money on Mazar-Dara-i-Suf road, 9 December 2019, \url{url}; Tolonews, Drivers Protest Extortion on Key Northern Highway, 20 December 2019, \url{url};\textsuperscript{3225} AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{3226} The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.
\item \textsuperscript{3227} AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, \url{url}.
\item \textsuperscript{3228} TLO, The Real Cost of Coal, n.d., \url{url}.
\item \textsuperscript{3229} AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, \url{url}.
\item \textsuperscript{3230} AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, \url{url}.
\item \textsuperscript{3231} Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces among 17 killed in Samangan attack, 27 September 2019, \url{url}.
\item \textsuperscript{3232} AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, \url{url}.
\item \textsuperscript{3233} AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, \url{url}.
\item \textsuperscript{3234} Pajhwok Afghan News, Dozens of illegal armed group active in Samangan, 8 April 2018, \url{url}.
\item \textsuperscript{3235} Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, \url{url}.
\end{itemize}
No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Samangan between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.  

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.

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. 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.

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. 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.

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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
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 forces, including military, police or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or local uprisings, or attacks on their facilities such as checkpoints and military bases. 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 2019 in Samangan/Aybak City in October 2019, were also registered under armed clashes.3251

The Taliban attacked Dara-i-Suf-e-Payin district a few times in the reporting period. In January 2020 the a Taliban group attack on the centre of Dara-Suf-e Payin was repelled. 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 districts, 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...
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. \textsuperscript{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 Taliban\textsuperscript{3260}, the killing of civilians by the Taliban in an area under their control in Dara-i Suf-e Payin district in January 2020\textsuperscript{3261} and the sexual assault on a midwife working at a clinic in Ruy-e Duab district in May 2019.\textsuperscript{3262} Nine individuals were detained in connection to the assault on the midwife.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3269} After more than two weeks of continued negotiations the health facilities reopened in the second week of November 2019.\textsuperscript{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.

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\textsuperscript{3259} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, [url](https://nytimes.com)

\textsuperscript{3260} Ariana News, Taliban Abducted 60 Truck Drivers in Samangan, 11 April 2019, [url](https://ariananews.com)

\textsuperscript{3261} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url](https://nytimes.com)

\textsuperscript{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](https://easo.org)

\textsuperscript{3263} Pajwok Afghan News, 9 detained for allegedly gang-raping midwife in Samangan, 21 May 2019, [url](https://pajwok.com)

\textsuperscript{3264} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](https://unama.org), p. 49

\textsuperscript{3265} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](https://unama.org), p. 49

\textsuperscript{3266} Pajwok Afghan News, Insurgents kidnap district chief in Samangan, 2 February 2020, [url](https://pajwok.com); 1TV, Taliban abduct Afghan district governor in Samangan: Mol, 24 February 2020, [url](https://1tv.com); RFE/RL, At Least Six Killed In Afghanistan Despite ‘Reduction Of Violence’ Deal, 24 February 2020, [url](https://rferl.org)

\textsuperscript{3267} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, [url](https://unocha.org), AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, [url](https://aan.co)

\textsuperscript{3268} AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019, [url](https://aan.co)


\textsuperscript{3270} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (4 – 10 November 2019), 13 November 2019, [url](https://unocha.org)
districts. More than 95% were displaced within the province itself. A few dozen were displaced to Balkh and Kabul provinces.\textsuperscript{3271}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 3,444 persons displaced within Samangan province. Samangan/Aybakh district hosted all.\textsuperscript{3272}


\textsuperscript{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

**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 Sancharak and the Sar-e Pul provincial centre. Moreover, the 2018 drought affected the rain-fed agricultural area.

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. The main ethnic group in the province are Uzbeks. Other groups present include Hazaras, Tajiks, Pashtun, Arabs, Aimaq and Balochs.

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).

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.

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.

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3274 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Sar-e Pul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](url)
3276 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Sar-i-Pul province, n.d., [url]
3277 Afghanistan, Office of the President, Province Profile Sar-e Pul, 1 February 2017, [url]
3280 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url], p. 26
3281 Reuters, Taliban threaten oil fields in northern Afghanistan, 4 January 2019, [url]
3284 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.\textsuperscript{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, Balkh and Sancharak districts.\textsuperscript{3288} In 2019 the provincial council chief of Sar-e Pul claimed 60 % of the province was under Taliban control.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 Khostanat district as ‘Taliban-controlled’, Balkh district as ‘government-controlled’ and the remaining districts in Sar-e Pul province as ‘contested’.\textsuperscript{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 Khostanat district. Their main activity in the province has consisted of offering military training to new Taliban recruits.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3297}

\textsuperscript{3287}Ruttig, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balkh District: Are the Taleban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{3288}Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, \url{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{url}
\textsuperscript{3289}Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces, Taliban suffer casualties in Sar-i-Pul clash, 9 April 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{3290}Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 47
\textsuperscript{3291}LWI, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url{url}. The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.
\textsuperscript{3292}Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{3293}Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{3294}EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pol; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
\textsuperscript{3295}USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, \url{url}, pp. 11-12, p. 50; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 14
\textsuperscript{3296}UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 94. No UNAMA data on civilian casualties in Sar-e Pul province were available for the first half of 2020.
\textsuperscript{3297}SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 72
ACLED collected data on 142 violent events in Sar-e Pol 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. While ACLED registered violent events in all of Sar-e Pol’s districts, Sar-e Pol and Sayad stood out as districts where most incidents were reported, with 50 and 31 incidents respectively.

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 militias, or government representatives, attacks on their facilities such as checkpoints, and military bases and attacks on convoys. 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. Relatives of the Sayad district chief were killed in December 2019.
as a result of a Taliban attack on his house.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3309} Two civilians were killed and another was wounded by crossfire in Gosfandi district in March 2020.\textsuperscript{3310}

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, as for example in Sancharak district in October 2019\textsuperscript{3311}, 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.\textsuperscript{3312}

There were reports of the Taliban capturing villages and localities in Sancharak district in March and April 2019.\textsuperscript{3313} In December 2019 government forces reportedly managed to regain control over villages in Sar-e Pul district.\textsuperscript{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 2020\textsuperscript{3315}, such as incidents of rocket or mortar fire both by Taliban and ANDSF in Sayad and Sar-e Pul districts.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3317} Five children were killed when an unexploded rocket shell went off while they were playing in Sar-e Pul district in July 2019.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 orders\textsuperscript{3320} and the killing of civilians for unknown or unclear reasons.\textsuperscript{3321} The Taliban also killed an election commission employee\textsuperscript{3322} and an incident of

\textsuperscript{3308} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, url; Pajhwoj Afghan News, 2 killed in attack on district chief residence, 2 December 2019, url
\textsuperscript{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 Miltants Looted 100 Sheep of Villagers in Sar-e Pol, 14 April 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3310} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, url
\textsuperscript{3311} Pajhwoj Afghan News, 5 killed, 7 wounded in fresh wave of violence, 7 October 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3312} Pajhwoj Afghan News, Seeking aid, dozens of Sar-i-Pul IDPs rally against govt, 5 March 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3314} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pol; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
\textsuperscript{3315} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pol; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
\textsuperscript{3316} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3317} Khaama Press, Premature car bomb explosion damages 10 houses, injures 13 civilians in Sar-e Pul, 28 November 2019, url
\textsuperscript{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 Pol; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url; Pajhwoj Afghan News, Unexploded rocket kills 4 Sar-i-Pul children, 17 July 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3319} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, url
\textsuperscript{3320} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3321} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pol; 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; Pajhwoj 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
\textsuperscript{3322} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url; Pajhwoj 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. 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. 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.

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. The New York Times reported about 19 Taliban attacks on polling sites across Sar-e Pul province on 28 September 2019, election day. 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.

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.

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.

### 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.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 7 938 persons displaced to 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.
2.32 Takhar

2.32.1 General description of the province

Map 32: Afghanistan – Takhar province, source: UNOCHA

UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)
Takhar province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Badakhshan 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. 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. The provincial capital is Taloqan. 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. The main ethnic group in the province are Uzbeks and Tajiks. Other groups present include Pashtuns, Hazaras and Arabs.

The Kunduz-Takhar Highway runs through the districts of Kalafgan, Taloqan and Bangi. 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. Drug smuggling routes leading into Central Asia run through some districts of Takhar province.

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’. In May 2019, journalist Bilal Sarwary noted an increased Taliban presence in Takhar province. 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 City, raising concern among the local people.

Reporting on the presidential elections of 28 September 2019, AAN described Khwajabahawuddin, Khwajaghar, Yangi Qala and Dasht-e Qala districts as ‘heavily contested’. 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 Taliban control, or the government was only visible in the district centre and immediate vicinity’. 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
3336 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
3337 Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, url
3338 Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, url
3339 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., url
3340 Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, url
3341 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., url
3342 Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Takhar, 1 February 2017, url
3343 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
3344 Afghanistans Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url
3345 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 27
3346 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taliban 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
3347 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taliban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url
3348 Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 22 May 2019, url
3349 Ali, O., Rutrig, T., Taliban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, url
3350 Afghanistan Times, Rampant insecurity stymies peace in Takhar, 8 April 2020, url
3351 AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (13): Observations from Kundahar, Takhar, Wardak and Balkh, 4 October 2019, url
3352 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, Khwajaghars and Yangi Qala districts as 'Taliban-controlled', Bagi, Darqad, Dasht-e Qala, Eshkamesh, Khwabajahawuddin and Taloqan districts as 'contested' and the remaining districts in Takhar province as 'government-controlled'.

Besides the Taliban, militants from ISKP, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), drug runners and criminals were reportedly active along the Tajik border in 2018 as well as members of the terrorist movement Jundullah, a splinter group of IMU, mainly composed of non-Pashtuns, Afghans. According to a February 2019 AAN report, Jundullah’s military wing, Jabha-ye Qariha, was operating in some northern districts of Takhar province. 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 Bukhari’s Battalion, operating in northern and north-eastern Afghanistan. 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.

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. 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 Pashtuns and the non-Pashtuns 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.

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. 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.

While a researcher for the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) mentioned small pockets of ISKP emerging in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces in August 2019, no security incidents specifically

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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,

3353 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017,

3354 Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat’s IS-affiliated ‘island’ survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018,

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,

3356 Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018,

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, p. 18


3359 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017,

3360 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017,

3361 National (The), ISIS recruitment is growing in Afghanistan as US and Taliban work for peace, 8 August 2019,
attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Takhar province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.\textsuperscript{3363}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Takhar province is under the responsibility of the 217\textsuperscript{th} 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.\textsuperscript{3364} The 217\textsuperscript{th} Corps has its headquarters in Kunduz.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3367}

ALP, local uprising forces and pro-government militias are present and active in some of Takhar’s districts.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 Takhar in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.\textsuperscript{3372}

\textsuperscript{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{https://www.acleddata.com}

\textsuperscript{3364} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2019, \url{https://www.sigar.mil}, p. 78


\textsuperscript{3367} Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, \url{https://www.aan.com}

\textsuperscript{3368} Khaama Press, Taliban’s ambush in Takhar kills 20 members of public uprising forces, 29 December 2019, \url{https://khaama.com}

\textsuperscript{3369} Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 pro-government militiamen killed in Takhar assault, 29 December 2019, \url{https://pajhwok.com}

\textsuperscript{3370} Pajhwok Afghan News, Takhar: 2 uprising members killed in Taliban attack, 15 January 2020, \url{https://pajhwok.com}

\textsuperscript{3371} Pajhwok Afghan News, A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, \url{https://www.aan.com}

\textsuperscript{3372} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{https://www.unama.org}, p. 94. No UNAMA data on civilian casualties in Takhar province were available for the first half of 2020.

\textsuperscript{3373} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{https://www.sigar.mil}, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{https://www.sigar.mil}, p. 72
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.

ACLED coded 70% of the violent events in Takhar province as battles, mainly armed clashes. 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), or attacks on military or police facilities such as checkpoints, bases and headquarters and on vehicles and convoys. 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. One civilian was killed in a Taliban attack on the residence of the Khwajaghar district police chief on 25 April 2019, in clashes between Taliban and government forces in Qala and Khwajaghar. No violent events were registered by ACLED in Hazar Sumuch and Warsaj districts.

![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 data](url)

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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]
3380 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-4 July 2019, [url]
30 March 2020. Fighting destroyed the houses of four families in Baharak district in May 2020. At least one civilian was killed during clashes following a Taliban attack in Chahab district in late June 2020.

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, as for example in Dasht-e-Qala in April 2019, 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. Several of the security operations were backed by air strikes.

Clashes between pro-government militias in Kalafgan district in March 2019 and in Chahab district in August 2019 also caused civilian casualties.

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 2019 and on Khwajaghar district centre in June and September 2019, 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. Control over Yangi Qala and Darqad districts has been changing hands between the Taliban and the government in the reporting period. The Taliban attacked Darqad district centre in November 2019 and April 2020, took over Chahab district centre for a few hours on 30 August 2019 and attacked a village in Baharak district in January 2020.

Air/drone strikes represented 21% of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Takhar province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. 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 to the Taliban.

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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
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
3394 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, url
3395 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, 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. 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 roadside bomb or on 12 January 2020 when a rocket fired by the Taliban hit a house, killing one child and injuring two. Seven civilians were injured when a bomb exploded in a hotel in Eshkamesh district in October 2019. A Taliban roadside bomb exploded prematurely in Taloqan on 20 March 2020, killing not only their own members, but also two children. At least nine students were killed, as a result of a bomb explosion inside a religious school in Eshkamesh district in June 2020.

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 2019 or the killing of civilians in Darqad district by the Tajikistan border police on 25 December 2019. 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. They also killed a civilian working as a cook on a military base in Dasht-e Qala district in March 2020 and kidnapped and beheaded a tribal elder in Taloqan City in April 2020. Unknown armed men killed an imam and the Taliban kidnapped and killed a former jihadi commander in Chahab district in June 2020.

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

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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
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
3404 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, url
3405 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, url
3406 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, url
3407 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2020, 9 August 2020, url
3408 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, url
3409 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, url
3410 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, url
3411 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, url
3412 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, url
3413 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, url
3414 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, url
Following through on an earlier warning, the Taliban destroyed towers of cell phone companies in Takhar province.3415 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, Khwajaghah, 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/cause 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

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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
3419 Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 observers killed, many beaten on polling day, 17 October 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., Rutting, T., Taliban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, 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
3428 Afghan Islamic Press (@aip_news), [Twitter], posted on 9 March 2020, url
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. 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. 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.

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.

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. UNOCHA 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. 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.

### 2.3.2.2 Displacement

UNOCHA reported regularly about continued clashes between AGEs and the ANDSF in Takhar causing displacement in the reporting period.

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. 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 support and in September 2019, due to clashes. 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

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3432 Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on 22 May 2019, [url](https://twitter.com/BilalSarwary/status/1131692779338590720)
3436 UNAMA, Afghanistan, Attacks on Health Care in 2020, [url](https://www.unama.org/Afghanistan-Conflict-2020)
3448 Khaama Press, Special Forces fully clear Baharak district of Takhar from the presence of Taliban militants, 6 July 2019, [url](https://khaama.com/news/special-forces-fully-clear-baharak-district-of-takhar-from-the-presence-of-taliban-militants/)
district. Most were displaced to Taloqan, but many also within the district or to Kunduz province. Conflict also caused the displacement of over 5,000 residents of Namakab and Darqad districts. 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.

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.

2.33 Uruzgan

2.33.1 General description of the province

Map 33: Afghanistan – Uruzgan province, source: UNOCHA

Uruzgan province is located in the central part of Afghanistan and is also known by the name ‘Rozgan’ or ‘Uruzganis’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3449} The district of Gizab, which was formerly part of Daykundi province, now falls within the administration of Uruzgan.\textsuperscript{3450} Chinarto and Surab are two new districts of the province; their status has not been officially recognised yet.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3453} The Kandahar-Uruzgan Highway runs through the districts of Chora and Tirinkot.\textsuperscript{3454} Taliban militants purportedly set up check-points along the highway and they searched or abducted travellers.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3456} Military operations were ongoing in February 2019, in order to clear the road from Taliban insurgents.\textsuperscript{3457} The city of Tirinkot hosts an airport, which was served by domestic scheduled passenger flights as of March 2019.\textsuperscript{3458} According to the UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Uruzgan province decreased by 38\% in 2019, compared to 2018.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{3448} Pajhwok Afghan News, Brief introduction of Uruzgan province, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{3449} Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, url, p. 35
\textsuperscript{3450} UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 6
\textsuperscript{3451} Pajhwok Afghan News, Uruzgan administrative units, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{3452} Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, url, p. 35
\textsuperscript{3453} Pajhwok Afghan News, Brief introduction of Uruzgan province, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{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
\textsuperscript{3456} Pajhwok Afghan News, Dilapidated Kandahar road gives passengers bumpy ride, 14 November 2018, url;
\textsuperscript{3457} Khaama Press, Militants suffer heavy casualties in ANDSF operations in Kandahar and Zabul, 7 February 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3458} Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
\textsuperscript{3459} Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, url
\textsuperscript{3460} Al Bawaba, In Uruzgan, Afghan Mothers Feed Their Children Opium to Make Them Sleep, 2 November 2017, url
\textsuperscript{3461} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, url, p. 13
\textsuperscript{3462} The Canberra 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.\footnote{RFE/RL/Gandhara , In Remote Afghan Corner, Besieged Afghan Troops Cry For Help 06 August 2019, \url{https://www.rferl.org/vatic/vaticStory.cfm?storyId=5d343166-95c1-419f-9e69-f5045d107f9c}}

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.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Uruzgan police chief sacked, summoned to Kabul 17 January 2020, \url{https://pajhwokafghanews.com/en/news/2020/1/17/police-chief-sacked-summoned-to-kabul}} In January 2020, provincial police chief was dismissed for the extortion of bribes from his subordinates and for stealing money intended for employees’ remuneration.\footnote{Bijlert M., The Taliban in Zabul and Uruzgan, Oxford University Press, 2013, \url{https://www.talibanistan.com/}}

Uruzgan was one of the first provinces affected by Taliban resurgence after 2001.\footnote{Arab News, Afghans turn to Taliban in forgotten province, 09 February 2020, \url{https://www.arabnews.com/en/news/afghans-turn-to-taliban-in-forgotten-province}} According to LWJ, only one Uruzgan district, Chora, is fully controlled by Taliban, others are contested.\footnote{LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url{https://www.lwj.org/map/}} In practice, the central authority is limited to the provincial capital, Tirinkot and AGEs took initiatives in the rest of the province.\footnote{LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url{https://www.lwj.org/map/}} 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.\footnote{The Canberra Times, Lessons to be learnt from failures in Uruzgan 26 June 2019, \url{https://www.canberratimes.com.au/australia/2019/06/26/lessons-to-be-learnt-from-failures-in-ruzgan.html}} The government administration has been evacuated to other place at least in two districts, according to Tolonews Survey.\footnote{Tolonews, 64 Administrative Units Partially Paralyzed In 19 Provinces, 01 July 2019, \url{https://www.tolonews.com/en/news/2019/7/1/64-administrative-units-partially-paralyzed-in-19-provinces.html}} 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.\footnote{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{https://www.aan.com/en/story/2018/11/28/taleban-attacks-on-khas-ruzgan-jaghori-and-malestan-i-a-new-and-violent-push-into-hazara-areas}}

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.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, ISKP fighters in the province have been former Taliban militants, 18 April 2018, \url{https://pajhwokafghanews.com/en/news/2018/4/18/iskp-fighters-in-the-province-have-been-former-taliban-militants}}

### 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.\footnote{Arab News, Afghans turn to Taliban in forgotten province, 09 February 2020, \url{https://www.arabnews.com/en/news/afghans-turn-to-taliban-in-forgotten-province}} 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).\footnote{LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url{https://www.lwj.org/map/}}

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.\footnote{ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, \url{https://www.acleddata.com/filtered-data}}
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. 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. 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. 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. 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).

Throughout 2019 and 2020, Taliban militants were active also in other districts in the province. 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. 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).

In August 2019, AGEs besieged military base in Charchino (Shahid-e-Hassas). On 2 September 2019 a prayer leader and six madrasa students were killed by Afghan security and NATO forces in the same area.
district and three days later 26 civilians were killed at the air strikes there.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3487}

In October 2019, heavy battles took place in Gizab district.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3489}

\subsection*{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.\textsuperscript{3490}

\section*{2.34 Wardak}

\subsection*{2.34.1 General description of the province}

Map 34: Afghanistan – Wardak province, source: UNOCHA\textsuperscript{3491}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{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
\item \textsuperscript{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
\item \textsuperscript{3488} Tolo News, Heavy Clashes Ongoing In Uruzgan with Casualties on Both Sides, 21 October 2019, url
\item \textsuperscript{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
\item \textsuperscript{3490} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 28 June 2020, url
\item \textsuperscript{3491} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Wardak Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
\end{itemize}
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3493} 3494

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Wardak province has a population of 660 258.\textsuperscript{3495} The main ethnic group in Wardak is Pashtun, followed by Hazara and Tajik enclaves.\textsuperscript{3496} The local Pashtun population belongs to a variety of Ghilzai tribes, primarily the Wardak, Kharoti and Hotak tribes.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{3498} Wardak province is inhabited by Sunni, as well as Shia Muslims.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3501} The areas around the Kabul-Kandahar Highway are densely populated.\textsuperscript{3502} Wardak province has no functioning airstrip and air traffic is regularly interrupted by bad weather conditions.\textsuperscript{3503}

According to UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018, Wardak province has maintained its poppy-free status since 2013.\textsuperscript{3504} UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52 % reduction in opium-poppys cultivation in the provinces of the central region (including Wardak province) and the central highlands.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3506}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item 3492 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Wardak Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
\item 3493 Washington Post (The), Taliban Blocks Major Afghan Highway in Expanding Attacks, 26 October 2016, url
\item 3494 Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Wardak, 2020, url;
\item 3495 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, url, p. 12
\item 3496 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, url, p. 4
\item 3497 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; Adli, A. Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Elections (29): A Statistical Overview of the Preliminary Results, AAN, 8 February 2020, url
\item 3498 AREU, The Political Economy of Education and Health Service Delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016, url, p. 33
\item 3499 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
\item 3500 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Wardak Provincial Overview, n.d., url
\item 3501 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
\item 3502 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Wardak Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
\item 3503 UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, url, p. 11
\item 3504 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 19
\item 3505 Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, url
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
2.34.2 Conflict background and actors in Wardak

Wardak is described as ‘among the relatively volatile provinces’ in the central region of the country, as an ‘area of high insecurity’ and ‘a hotbed for the insurgency’. Intense fighting between militant groups and government forces has been reported in several parts of the province, with civilians often caught in the crossfire.

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. According to several sources reporting in 2019 and 2020, the Taliban in Wardak have been strengthening their presence, influence and control and ‘enjoy widespread support’ in their ‘strongholds’ in the province. The militant group’s Khalid bin Walid training camp has reportedly been training recruits in Wardak. 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. Taliban groups from Pakistan reportedly use the route through the southern district of Shamulzayi in Zabol province to deploy their forces further into Ghazni and Wardak provinces.

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.

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

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 their Her Assassination, 4 October 2019, 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
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.  

Sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in the districts of Jalrez, Saydabad, Chak, Daymirdad and Nerkh. 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. In May 2019, Chak district was reportedly assaulted by 200 Taliban fighters. 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. In July 2019, the Taliban reportedly banned shops and bakeries in the bazaar of Chak’s district centre. In April 2020, the area of Seebak Bazar in Chak district was reported under Taliban control, with militants patrolling the village. In June 2020, the Tangi Valley in Saydabad was described as a haven for the Taliban in Wardak province.

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 form Nerkh. 20 kilometres of the Kabul-Bamyan Highway, traversing Jalrez district, have reportedly been under

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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.]


3526 Jackson, A., Perspectives on Peace from Talibans Areas of Afghanistan, USIP, May 2019, URL: [p. 6]


3529 Jackson, A., Perspectives on Peace from Talibans Areas of Afghanistan, USIP, May 2019, URL: [p. 6]

3530 RFE/RL, IS Claims Deadly Blast near Afghan Military Academy, 30 May 2019, 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 Hayawi 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, Seyyah 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 district, 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 August and September 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.\(^{3546}\)

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\(^{3533}\) Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url](https://www.antracker.org/antracker/pdfs/one_land_two_rules_9.pdf)

\(^{3534}\) See sources mentioned below.

\(^{3535}\) Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Involved in High Profile Attacks, Assassinations Has Been Killed in Wardak, 9 March 2019, [url](https://khaama.com/2019/03/09/201903090075)

\(^{3536}\) 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](https://www.salaamtimes.com/2019/11/05/488524-sustained-annihilation-of-taliban-leaders-throws-group-into-disarray/)

\(^{3537}\) Khaama Press, Taliban’s Shadow District Chief and His 6 Security Guards killed in Wardak, 7 July 2019, [url](https://khaama.com/2019/07/07/201907070050)

\(^{3538}\) Khaama Press, Airstrike Kills Top Taliban Leaders Including the Group’s Intelligence Chief in Wardak, 20 August 2019, [url](https://khaama.com/2019/08/20/201908200050)


\(^{3543}\) Xinhua, Afghan Intelligence Agency Captures 6 Taliban Militants Near Kabul, 27 January 2020, [url](https://news.xinhua.net/english.news.2020.01/2020-01/27/c_139315305.htm)

\(^{3544}\) Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Kill the Shadow Governor of Taliban for Wardak Province, 12 April 2020, [url](https://khaama.com/2020/04/12/202004120040)


\(^{3546}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s District Police Chief Among 7 killed in Wardak Firefight, 5 April 2020, [url](https://pajhwok.com/en/2020/04/05/talibans-district-police-chief-among-7-killed-in-wardak-firefight-05562012/)

\(^{3547}\) Khaama Press, Key Talibans Shadow Governor of Wardak Province, 5 April 2020, [url](https://khaama.com/2020/04/05/202004050048)

\(^{3548}\) Khaama Press, Key Taliban Red Unit Group Member Killed in Wardak Clash, 16 June 2020, [url](https://khaama.com/2020/06/16/202006160054)

\(^{3549}\) Stanford University, Mapping Militant Organizations: Haqqani Network, 8 November 2017, [url](https://www.stanford.edu/group/hsic/other/MMO/haqqani_network/index.html)
Mid-July 2016, UNAMA reported on groups claiming allegiance to ISKP as operational in Wardak.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016, \url{url}, p.73} In 2017, a possible emergence of ISKP was reported in the Takana area in Jalrez district.\footnote{Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, \url{url}} 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.\footnote{EASO COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION REPORT: AFGHANISTAN - SECURITY SITUATION} 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.\footnote{USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 14} 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.\footnote{Clark, K., CIA-Backed Afghan Paramilitaries Accused of Grave Abuses: New Human Rights Watch Report, AAN, 31 October 2019, \url{url}}

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.\footnote{Giustozzi, A., Nomad-Settler Conflict in Afghanistan Today, AREU, October 2019, \url{url}, pp. 8, 19, 21; Tolonews, Govt Team Probes Prolonged Violent Feuding in Wardak, 8 July 2020, \url{url}} When the tensions between Kuchi nomads and local Hazara residents intensified in 2015, a public uprising happened, called the Resistance Front, was created by Hazara commander Abdul Ghani Alipur.\footnote{Tolonews, Alipoor Says He is ‘Ready to Hand Over All Weapons’, 27 November 2018, \url{url}} 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 forces\footnote{Tolonews, Alipoor Says He is ‘Ready to Hand Over All Weapons’, 27 November 2018, \url{url}} as well as of extorting, harassing and kidnapping Pashtun passengers on the highway between Maydan Shahr and Jalrez, reportedly in retaliation for attacks on Hazaras.\footnote{Tolonews, Alipoor Supports Protest for the Second Day in Kabul, 26 November 2018, \url{url}} His supporters claimed that Alipur had been fighting the Taliban\footnote{Washington Post (The), Afghan Authorities Free Hazara Fighter Whose Arrest Ignited Street Clashes, 27 November 2018, \url{url}}, patrolling and ensuring the safety of Hazara travellers on the main highway leading to Kabul.\footnote{RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader after Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, \url{url}} After violent Hazara protests broke out in several parts of the country, Alipur was released from NDS custody.\footnote{Foschini, F., The Kuchi-Hazara Conflict, Again, AAN, 27 May 2010, \url{url}} According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, the Taliban have exploited local land disputes between ethnic Hazaras and Kuchis to gain the latter’s support.\footnote{ACCORD, Query Response on Afghanistan: Wardak Province, Behsud District (see below), reportedly as a sign of support for the Pashtun Kuchi people in the area.} 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.\footnote{NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, \url{url}} In June 2020, dozens of road construction workers were reportedly abducted
310 — EASO COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION REPORT: AFGHANISTAN – SECURITY SITUATION

and abused by armed men from Alipur’s Hazara militia, and the killing of more than a dozen people due to armed confrontations between local residents and Kuchi nomads was reported.

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. Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Wardak province in the first quarter of 2020 and between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020. 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.

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.

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 arbaki is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias).

Examples of such incidents included assaults on security checkpoints/outposts and headquarters in

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3561 Pajhwok Afghan News, Alipur’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
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 2019\textsuperscript{3571}, in May 2020\textsuperscript{3572} and in June 2020\textsuperscript{3573}, in Sayadabad district in May 2019\textsuperscript{3574}, in April 2020\textsuperscript{3575} and in May 2020\textsuperscript{3576}, in Chak district in May 2019\textsuperscript{3577}, in Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud district in May 2019\textsuperscript{3578}, in Nerkh district in April 2020\textsuperscript{3579} and in May 2020\textsuperscript{3580}, and in Jalrez district in June 2020\textsuperscript{3581}; as well as attacks/ambushes on security convoys/vehicles in Sayadabad district in September 2019\textsuperscript{3582} and in Nerkh\textsuperscript{3583} and Jalrez\textsuperscript{3584} 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 Shahr in May 2019\textsuperscript{3585}, 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.\textsuperscript{3586} These incidents involved several ANDSF operations in Sayadabad district in March 2019\textsuperscript{3587}, in June 2019\textsuperscript{3588}, in August 2018\textsuperscript{3589}, in October 2019\textsuperscript{3590} and in November 2019\textsuperscript{3591}, 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 2019\textsuperscript{3592}, in August 2019\textsuperscript{3593}, in October 2019\textsuperscript{3594} and in November 2019.\textsuperscript{3595} In operations in Nerkh district in July 2019\textsuperscript{3596}, in August 2019\textsuperscript{3597} and in September 2019\textsuperscript{3598}, several prominent Taliban figures were killed (see above). In several operations in Jaghato district in May 2019\textsuperscript{3599} and in Jalrez district in January 2020\textsuperscript{3600}, 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 Saikan 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.\textsuperscript{3601} According to UNAMA, the level of

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\textsuperscript{3571} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3572} Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Repulse Taliban Attack in Wardak Province: 203rd Thunder Corps, 6 May 2020, [url]
\textsuperscript{3573} Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on: 26 June 2020, [url]
\textsuperscript{3574} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Claims Inflicting Casualties on Security Forces in Maidan Wardak, 7 May 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3575} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s District Police Chief Among 7 killed in Wardak Firefight, 5 April 2020, [url]
\textsuperscript{3576} Pajhwok Afghan News, 23 Taliban Killed in Maidan Wardak, Logar Clashes, 1 May 2020, [url]
\textsuperscript{3577} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Claims Inflicting Casualties on Security Forces in Maidan Wardak, 7 May 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3578} Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Pro-Govt Fighters Killed in Maidan Wardak Attack, 12 May 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3579} Khaama Press, 6 Taliban Militants Killed, 4 Wounded in Wardak Operations: Thunder Corps, 20 April 2020, [url]
\textsuperscript{3580} Pajhwok Afghan News, 23 Taliban Killed in Maidan Wardak, Logar Clashes, 1 May 2020, [url]
\textsuperscript{3581} Khaama Press, Key Taliban Red Unit Group Member Killed in Wardak Clash, 16 June 2020, [url]
\textsuperscript{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]
\textsuperscript{3583} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), [url]
\textsuperscript{3584} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), [url]
\textsuperscript{3585} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{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]
\textsuperscript{3587} Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Involved in High Profile Attacks, Assassinations Has Been Killed in Wardak, 9 March 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3588} Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill 13 Militants, Detain 9 More in Wardak Operations, 30 June 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3589} Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 9 Taliban Militants in Wardak Province, 10 August 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3590} Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 38 Taliban Militants in Daykundi and Wardak, 31 October 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3591} Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 Taliban Killed in Maidan Wardak Raid, Airstrike, 9 November 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3592} Khaama Press, 9 Militants Killed, Roadside Bombs and House-borne IED Destroyed in Kapisa and Wardak, 29 June 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3593} Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill 13 Militants, Detain 9 More in Wardak Operations, 30 June 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3594} Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 9 Taliban Militants in Wardak Province, 10 August 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3595} Pajhwok Afghan News, Clearing operation Ongoing in Maidan Wardak, 24 October 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3596} Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 Taliban Killed in Maidan Wardak Raid, Airstrike, 9 November 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3597} Khaama Press, Taliban’s Shadow District Chief and His 6 Security Guards killed in Wardak, 7 July 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3598} Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 13 Taliban Militants During the Operations in Wardak, 6 August 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3599} Pajhwok Afghan News, Key figures Among 22 Rebels Killed in Maidan Wardak, 5 September 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3600} Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces Inflict Casualties on Taliban Militants in Wardak Province, 20 May 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3601} Xinhua, Afghan Intelligence Agency Captures 6 Taliban Militants Near Kabul, 27 January 2020, [url]
\textsuperscript{3602} 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
civilians, particularly those carried out by NDS special forces and other CIA-backed militia groups, is rising. Together with Paktya province, Wardak is mentioned as a ‘hot spot’ for these kind of operations.

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.

While these air/drone strikes mostly inflicted losses among AGEs, some also caused civilian casualties - such as a combined US and Afghan forces air strike in Jaghatu district in July 2019, killing several civilians, an air strike conducted by American and Afghan forces in Saydabad district in September 2019, causing the death of at least seven civilians; 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.

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 2020, followed by Maydan Shahr, Chak and Nerkh districts. 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. In October 2019, a car bomb targeting the convoy of Wardak’s governor killed three civilian traffic department employees in a nearby car.

ACLED coded 3% of the violent incidents in Wardak as ‘shelling, artillery and missile attacks’. Some of these incidents resulted in civilian casualties - for example in August 2019, when an ANA-fired...
artillery round hit a wedding celebration in Chak district, and in October 2019, when a rocket fired by the Taliban landed on a civilian home in Nerkh district.

ACLED categorised 5% of all reported violent incidents in Wardak as 'violence against civilians'. These incidents involved ANDSF (night)raids and operations in Saydabad district in March 2019, and in Nerkh district in April 2019, 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 more, Taliban ambushes/attacks and killings of civilians and off-duty security personnel in Jalrez district in June 2019, in Saydabad district in April 2020 and in Chak district in May 2020; 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); 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 2019; 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.

Wardak’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 reached around 27%. AAN related Wardak’s below average voter registration to the ‘high insecurity’ in the province. In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 51-75% of respondents in Wardak province reported to have experienced fear while voting. 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. 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. The majority of the violence in Maydan Shahr on polling day involved indirect fire, especially rockets, 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

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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, NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 8-15, 14 March 2019, url
3618 Pajhwok Afghan News, Maidan Wardak Operation Leaves 6 of a Family Killed, 20 April 2019, url
3619 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 19-25, 25 April 2019, url
3620 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, url
3621 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 31-June 6, 6 June 2019, url
3622 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Kill 3 Off-Duty Soldiers in Wardak, 21 April 2020, url
3623 Pajhwok Afghan News, Chak District Police Chief Killed in Taliban Attack, 23 May 2020, url
3624 Pajhwok Afghan News, Chak District Police Chief Killed in Taliban Attack, 23 May 2020, url
3625 Khaama Press, A Tribal Leader and Family Members Killed in Wardak, 7 June 2020, Tolonews, 'Taliban' Kill 4 Members of Family in Wardak: Officials, 7 June 2020, url
3627 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, url
3630 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, p. 98
3631 Warden, S., Past as Prologue? What the Parliamentary Election Results Tell Us About the September Presidential Election, AAN, 23 August 2019, url
3632 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, p. 62
3633 Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Rockets Land near Hekmatyar’s Election Campaign Rally, 22 August 2019, 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.\textsuperscript{3632}

Many of Wardak’s highways are described as ‘not safe for civilians’\textsuperscript{3633} and ‘unprotected by the government’.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 highway\textsuperscript{3636}, controlling some parts of the road\textsuperscript{3637} and using roadblocks to target government employees and members of the Afghan security forces.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{3639} In June 2019, the Taliban reportedly killed three civilian passengers on the road from Maydan Shar to Jalrez district.\textsuperscript{3640} In October 2019, the same road, also known as Highway Two connecting Afghanistan’s capital to the Hazarajat region\textsuperscript{3641}, was reopened by ANDSF forces, after having been closed since mid-September.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{3646}
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 Jalrez 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. 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), Saydabad, Maydan Shah, Daymirdad and Nerkh, in the first half of September 2019, UNOCHA reported on the displacement of around 1,400 people from the area of Deh Afghan in Maydan Shahr district, due to clashes between non-state armed groups and ANDSF forces.

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). 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.

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 neighboring Paktya province who found refuge in Wardak’s Maydan Shahr district in October 2019.

IOM data from the first half of 2019 ranked two out of five persons in 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. 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. 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.
2.35 Zabul

2.35.1 General description of the province

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); 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). 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. It is composed mainly of Pashtuns belonging to mainly Hotak and Tokhi tribes and Baloch. The province is also known by the name ‘Zabalistan’ and is considered the birthplace of the Pashtun ethnic group.

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

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3660 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Zabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
3661 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Zabul Provincial Overview, n.d., [url]
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 One\(^{3668}\), 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 203\(^{rd}\) 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 Qalat\(^{3678}\) 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

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\(^{3668}\) Telegraph (The), Kabul-Kandahar highway is a symbol of what’s gone wrong in Afghanistan, 9 September 2012, [url](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2012/09/09/kabul-kandahar-highway-is-a-symbol-of-whats-gone-wrong-in/)


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\(^{3676}\) The Guardian, Civil war, poverty and now the virus: Afghanistan stands on the brink, 2 May 2020, [url](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/02/civil-war-poverty-and-now-the-virus-

\(^{3677}\) USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, [url](https://www.defense.gov/2020/06/01/fact-sheet-us-afghanistan-ministry-of-defense-

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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.  

In October 2019, the government started the military operation called Gen. Abdul Razeq (former Kandahar Police chef killed by the Taliban in 2018), aimed at clearing the Kabul-Kandahar Highway around Zabul.  

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 tribe and there are many Zabulis in the Taliban’s higher ranks including Mullah Amir Khan Haqqani. Taliban recruitment is also very popular among Zabulis. Moreover, the ‘feeling of being forgotten by the government’ is reportedly one of the reasons for the considerable Taliban presence in the area.

The Taliban contest or control most of Zabul, where government forces are under constant attack. 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.

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. According to AAN, also Mizana district centre was relocated near Qalat City later in the summer.

Besides local Taliban insurgents, ISKP is purportedly present in several districts of the province, however probably it is not military active. The United Nations also reported that Zabul is one of three provinces ‘with the most significant numbers’ of al Qaeda operatives present.

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 3% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, suicide IEDs and air strikes. Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 25 civilian

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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).  

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.

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.

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. 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.

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. On 19 May 2020, IED planted in Mizan district killed four civilians and wounded another eight, including children.

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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 1,270 persons left their houses in Arghandab in November 2019, but the group stayed within the district.3706

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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
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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