



Afghanistan: Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 12 September 2011

Do the Taliban in Afghanistan have a record of forcibly recruiting locals to fight for them? If so, how long have they practiced forced recruitment? Have such practices been enforced since 2008 or before? Are there consequences for refusal to become a recruit, and if so, what are the consequences?

The *US Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices* published in April 2011 notes under the heading Child Soldiers:

“The UN secretary-general's April report also noted that children were recruited and used for military purposes by several antigovernment and insurgent groups, including the Haqqani network, Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG), the Taliban, the Tora Bora Front, and the Jamat Sunat al-Dawa Salafia.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that insurgent recruitment of underage soldiers was on the rise. There were numerous credible reports that the Taliban and other insurgent forces recruited children younger than age 18, in some cases as suicide bombers and human shields and in other cases to assist with their work. NGOs and UN agencies reported that the Taliban tricked children, promised them money, or forced them to become suicide bombers.” (US Department of State (8 April 2011) *Afghanistan: Country Report on Human Rights Practices - 2010*)

The previous years report states:

“Anecdotal evidence suggests that insurgent recruitment of underage soldiers was on the rise. There were numerous credible reports that the Taliban and other insurgent forces recruited children younger than 18, in some cases as suicide bombers and in other cases to assist with their work. For example, in Uruzgan the Taliban reportedly used children to dig hiding places for IEDs. There were many reports of insurgents using minor teenage boys as combatants in Paktya province. In July in Helmand province, authorities apprehended a child before he allegedly would have been equipped to become a suicide bomber. NDS officials held several children in the juvenile detention facility in Helmand on insurgency-related charges. Although most of the children were 15 or 16 years old, reports from Ghazni province indicated that insurgents recruited children as young as 12, particularly if they already owned motorbikes and weapons. NGOs and UN agencies reported that the Taliban tricked, promised money to children, or forced them to become suicide bombers.” (US Department of State (11 March 2010) *Afghanistan: Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2009*)

A report from *Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict* states on page 32 under the heading ‘Recruitment by the Taliban and Other Armed Opposition Groups’:

“The Taliban, Haqqani network, Hezbi-i-Islami, Jamat Sunat al-Dawa Salafia and other armed groups have recruited children to be used as fighters, camp guards or suicide bombers, particularly along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. In some cases, children had been trained in foreign countries to undertake suicide missions. In other cases, children have been involuntarily involved in the insurgency as explosives were hidden in their bags or clothing unbeknownst to them.¹⁷⁷ For example, on April 12, 2009, a young boy was killed when a bomb planted in his wheelbarrow exploded 50 feet from a government building in Aybak city, in Samangan. The boy was not aware that he was carrying the explosive device, according to UNAMA.

There are no precise figures on child soldiers in Afghanistan but several reports attest to the severity of the concern. In particular, widespread displacement and the consequent absence of protective community structures have increased the vulnerability of children to recruitment. The March 2009 Secretary-General’s report on Children and Armed Conflict noted that forced recruitment of children by armed groups is “prevalent in areas with high concentrations of returnees or internally displaced persons, particularly in the south and southeastern provinces.” The surge in international armed forces is feared to trigger a new rise in the recruitment and use of child soldiers by armed opposition groups as part of new large-scale recruitment drives.” (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (14 June 2010) *Afghanistan: "Setting the Right Priorities: Protecting Children Affected by Armed Conflict in Afghanistan"*)

A report from the *UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan* states:

“Documented cases show that children are also used as suicide bombers by the Taliban. Children involved range from 13-16 years of age and, according to testimonies of failed bombers, have been tricked, promised money or otherwise forced to become suicide bombers. However, some children who have attempted suicide attacks have been heavily indoctrinated, many times in foreign countries, and efforts must be undertaken to combat this practice. That said, some reports suggest that, in the latest incidents of children used in bombings, they may not have been aware of what they were carrying, and explosives were set off remotely without their knowledge.” (UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (May 2010) *Afghanistan: "Visit of the Special Representative for Children & Armed Conflict to Afghanistan"*)

A 2010 report from *UNICEF* states:

“Children continue to face multiple risks to their personal safety, especially as community support mechanisms remain weak and there are few government services to protect them and their families from gender-based violence, domestic abuse and exploitation. Armed groups also continue to recruit children to be used as spies and informants or transport explosives and conduct suicide attacks. These children are subject to arrest, capture and detention without due process by Afghan and international military forces for their alleged association with armed groups.”(UNICEF (4 February 2010) *Humanitarian Action Report 2010*)

An Afghan TV debate was reported by *BBC Monitoring* in 2009 and notes:

“Taliban force villagers to join them

[Azimi, in Dari] Look, 50 to 70 per cent of the people fighting alongside the Taliban have either joined the group due to intimidation or money, poverty and other factors like propaganda, etc. Given our calculation, when Taliban capture an area, they get 50 to 70 per cent of their fighters from among the people due to the above reasons. For instance, the Taliban recruit by force one person from each family in a village. Therefore, when we retake an area from the Taliban, then we will in fact deprive the Taliban of having the above opportunities. The same thing happened in Musa Qala. When we captured Musa Qala, most of the people, who had been working with Taliban due to pressure, forced recruitment and money, gradually returned to their areas and started normal life. If we manage to establish a sound administration and create working opportunities in the area, 50 to 70 per cent of the enemy fighters will reduce without being killed. We should not forget that at the same time offensives against the enemy will continue, and as I said, the enemy suffered tens of casualties in the past 24 hours.” (BBC Monitoring (10 July 2009) *Afghan TV debates impact of Helmand operations*)

A report in *Agence France Presse* published in 2001 notes:

“Foreign aid workers fear the Taliban could use a refugee camp the militia has built in Afghanistan as a conscription ground for troops to fight the United States.

A camp established close to a key crossing point into Pakistan was initially seen as a humanitarian gesture to help tens of thousands of people fleeing US bombardments.

But policies of forced recruitment, appeals to tribes in both countries to send troops, and refugee claims that the Taliban is forcing civilians to accept arms has forced aid groups to question the militia's motives.

"We are extremely concerned about the militarisation of Internally Displaced People," UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokeswoman Fatoumata Kaba told AFP.

"It is a real fear because we have seen this type of thing before in other camps in African countries like Rwanda and Afghan refugees are telling us that the Taliban are distributing guns to people who don't want to fight." Afghan men are deliberately avoiding the Taliban camp and the border town of Spinboldak en-route to sanctuary in Chaman, Pakistan, aid workers said.

Refugees also claimed men were being held back in Afghanistan while their women and children fled to Pakistan.” (Agence France Presse (26 October 2001) *Taliban target refugee camp for recruits*)

Another report from *Agence France Presse* published in 2001 states:

“The Taliban militia is forcibly conscripting fleeing refugees in eastern Afghanistan to bolster their frontline positions, independent sources here said Sunday.

"Refugees are being stopped at Taliban checkpoints and the men are being separated from the women and children.

They are being sent to the frontlines and the women and children are making it across the border," a western aid source told AFP.

The sources, who all requested not to be identified, said the bulk of the new recruits were being armed and sent to the frontlines north of Kabul, where the Taliban are battling opposition forces loosely allied under the banner of the Northern Alliance.

They said any men of fighting age -- ranging between 15 and 40-years-old -- were being pulled off buses at several posts along the main Kabul to Pakistan highway, especially outside Kabul and near the eastern city of Jalalabad.

Aid workers said they had learned of the forced recruitment drive from refugees arriving in this Pakistani border city." (Agence France Presse (30 September 2001) *Taliban forcibly recruiting for frontlines: independent sources*)

A report from *Associated Press* published in January 2006 reports:

"Gunmen killed a former Taliban leader who switched loyalties and supported Afghanistan's U.S.-backed government after the hard-line militia was ousted in late 2001.

Meanwhile, violence elsewhere killed 10 others and wounded 40 people celebrating the Islamic feast of the sacrifice as well as one U.S. soldier, officials said Saturday.

Two men on a motorbike fatally shot Mohammed Khaksar, the former Taliban deputy interior minister, police chief Gen. Abdul Wahid said.

He said Khaksar was shot in the heart and head on Saturday as he was walking with two of his children in the southern city of Kandahar, a former Taliban stronghold.

A purported Taliban spokesman, Qari Mohammed Yousaf, claimed responsibility in a call to The Associated Press.

"He was a traitor to our cause," said Yousaf, whose exact ties to the rebel leaders are not known. "We will kill all Taliban members who do this."

Khaksar, who was in his late 40s, secretly contacted the United States in 1999 to seek American help in stopping the Taliban. He renounced the movement after its collapse and last September, he ran as a candidate in legislative elections but lost.

In an interview at the time with The Associated Press, Khaksar said Taliban rebels had threatened his life several times. He said he supported President Hamid Karzai, as well as the deployment of international forces in the mountainous country." (Associated Press (14 January 2006) *Former Taliban minister who switched sides killed; 10 others die in Afghan violence*)

A copy of the Taliban military rulebook from a report by *Amnesty International* notes:

“Appendix 2. Taleban military rulebook, the Layeha

Every Mujahid must abide by the following rules: 1) A Taliban commander is permitted to extend an invitation to all Afghans who support infidels so that they may convert to the true Islam. 2) We guarantee to any man who turns his back on infidels, personal security and the security of his possessions. But if he becomes involved in a dispute, or someone accuses him of something, he must submit to our judiciary. 3) Mujahideen who protect new Taliban recruits must inform their commander. 4) A convert to the Taliban, who does not behave loyally and becomes a traitor, forfeits our protection. He will be given no second chance. 5) A Mujahid who kills a new Taliban recruit forfeits our protection and will be punished according to Islamic law.” (Amnesty International (19 April 2007) *Afghanistan - All Who Are Not Friends, Are Enemies: Taleban Abuses against Civilians*)

A report in the *Guardian* published in June 2010 states:

“British commanders recently returned from Helmand province today painted a devastating picture of the corrupt and ill-disciplined local police force, saying Afghans gave it as the main reason why they joined the Taliban.

The problem is particularly serious since Afghan security forces are key to the Nato-led counterinsurgency strategy, they made clear. They also said the lack of Afghan security forces was the reason why Sangin, where six marines have been killed within the last month, remained such a dangerous area for foreign troops.

The police are "most often cited as why there is a problem and why people joined the Taliban", Brigadier James Cowan, commander of 11 Brigade which has just returned from a six-month deployment in southern Afghanistan, told a press briefing.

"So often captured Taliban mention the police as the reason for joining in the first place", he added.” (Guardian (3 June 2010) *Afghan police failings fuelling Taliban recruitment, say UK army chiefs*)

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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